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Mistakes are Made for the Better, Really

A/N: This will include smut and breif mentions of abortion. If you didnt see the tags this also includes Male Pregnancy so please if your are uncomfortable with this dont continue reading. I have given you a warning. Enjoy!!
****
He leaned back in his chair, blinking slow and lazy against the haze of alcohol. Because Albus could throw a party, when he wanted. Soft music was threading through the teacher's lounge; the lights were thankfully low. He could just make out Minerva and Poppy swaying together across the lounge, wrapped up in one another's arms, Poppy's head on Minerva's shoulder.

And Severus let himself smile faintly, sipping at his scotch.

He felt heavy in the best kind of way - that submersion into alcohol was wildly different than most he had encountered. Because normally, it was him drinking straight from the bottle, sucking in haphazardly large gulps in an effort to shake the night off and then to shake the memories off.

Because *Merlin* had Voldemort driven him to drink. And a year was hardly long enough for his body to heal, let alone his mind.

Once more his gaze swept the room, catching on Hagrid and Flitwit and Sprout where they drank at the table, laughing. On Albus and Trelawney quibbling over tarot cards. On Lupin . . . making in his direction, bottle in hand. He fought down the urge to roll his eyes, because the entire staff of Hogwarts knew even when - or perhaps *especially* when - Severus had fallen into his cups and been made something that was almost softer, it still wasn't an open invitation to talk. And they all accepted and *respected* that. All of them but Lupin it seemed.

He drained his glass just as Lupin sat down.

Remus knew he was being . . . perhaps intrusive. But Severus looked as though his edges had softened just barely. And the drinking and Minerva had encouraged him. Because the older professor had smiled widely and nudged him, even as Poppy had rolled her eyes and thrust the bottle into his hand.

He leaned forward and sloshed some scotch into Severus's glass. Those dark eyes pinned him in place, gaze suspicious but not quite dismissive.

"To a year free of that mad bastard," Remus quipped, his glass lifted in a toast.

An eyebrow lifted, and Remus swore he could see those lips twisting just slightly in humor. Severus's glass touched his just barely, in the softest of clinks, before the other tipped his head back and drained the entire drink. Which was surprising and delightful as Remus followed suit, determined to not choke on the sharp burn of the liquor.

"Bored," the darker man drawled slowly, and Remus was hard pressed not to pull a confused look, swimming through his own haze of alcohol to understand.

"Not particularly, thought you might be though."

Severus snorted and leaned far closer into the werewolf's personal space, snagging the bottle where it sat on the floor. He pointedly ignored the hitch of the Lupin's breath as he poured them both a new drink - a larger drink, one meant for sipping. The bottle thumped back down on the ground.

"Pleasantly numb," he admitted, sipping at his drink and regarding the other lazily. Because Lupin had taken to conversing with him more than strictly necessary in the past months, since the Dark Lord had crumpled. Because Lupin had ignored Severus's every effort to dissuade . . . whatever it was that the damn lycanthrope was after.

A brief moment of quiet, where Remus found himself thinking of all the reasons Severus would want to be numb and coming up with *far* too many reasons, and then there was that silky tone in his ear

again.

"What are you after, Lupin."

Blinking dumbly, he glanced up at Severus. Even under the haze of alcohol, Remus could see the almost vulnerability in those dark eyes. Because years had taught Severus to be suspicious and wary - which pained him, because Remus had been rather . . . transparent in what he wanted, he thought. Because Severus pulled at him just as surely as the moon. Had always done so, but more so as the Wizarding World had tried to tear itself apart at the seams and didn't.

Needing liquid courage, he drained his glass, scooting to the edge of his seat and leaning forward to retrieve the bottle but stopped with his fingers barely brushing glass.

"You," he admitted softly, letting his word be swept up and away under the music if Severus was so inclined.

It was . . . alarming how Severus cracked open at that single word. Because years of war had seen him bundled up and distant, unable to reach out because the world demanded him be a cold, aloof monster of a man. Which was easier than something soft and vulnerable but that didn't mean he didn't fleetingly think of that novelty. So, he let himself be swept along by the werewolf.

A year had passed since Voldemort had fallen - for good this time. And Severus reminded himself he was allowed to shake the shackles of the past off . . . just this once.

He drained his drink. "Your rooms, or mine?"

And so, they stumbled into the room together, all possessive hands and hungry mouths. Just two dark creatures taking enjoyment in the feel of one another.

The Celebration of Life at Hogwarts Castle, even with the full moon looming, had seemed as good a catalyst as any other for this moment. Or rather - that's how Remus felt, as he licked and bit softly at the neck of a one Severus Snape, eliciting the most

arousing moans in that brandy and chocolate tone. With too much whisky in his system, his thoughts wouldn't quiet, but instead turned into a shout. Because there was Severus riling the wolf under his skin, as the darker man was wont to do.

If he were honest with himself, Remus had always been intrigued by Severus - and it had only gotten worse in the years since Hogwarts. The war had thrown them together, both in battle and close quarters. And Severus had never been anything but himself - suspicious with a quick, dark wit and heavy sarcasm - even if Remus had been playing nursemaid to him. And slowly Remus had come to the understanding there was very little malice for *him* in that tone, but rather for the world at large, at the situation at hand.

All in all, it had been more than easy to banter back, to fall into an almost understanding where Severus would suffer him with rolled eyes, and Remus would cautiously continue to chase him. Which had somehow led to the wolf in him becoming rather smitten with the dark man, with sharp teeth and sharper words that threatened to eviscerate if Remus mis-stepped. He, in general, had become rather smitten with the dark man. With the lingering danger of the other, finely wrapped up in control and snark - all of which hinted at something monumental when Severus finally let himself go. And Remus swore to be the one to catch him.

"Merlin, so many buttons," Remus panted, clutching hard at Severus's robe to conceal his finely quivering hands. He pushed his lips to that pale column of skin once more, set on eliciting more of those delicious sounds. Fingers in his hair rucked, dug in at his scalp, and Remus groaned low in his throat, nipping at Severus's skin impatiently as his fingers stumbled over the tiny buttons.

Severus chuckled and disentangled himself from the pawing werewolf. The blended malt had settled rather nicely in his mostly empty stomach, had pleasantly wrapped hazy arms around his thoughts and left him feeling confident. He was allowed some indulgent behavior - after all, he had spent most of his life in various forms of peril. Heading for the bedroom, certain the lycanthrope would follow, he muttered the spell to undo all those buttons - because as Lupin had expressed, there was a blue million of them. The outer robe was more for presence - to make him

darker and more foreboding as it were - though it offered up practical benefits when it came to potions brewing.

Heat pressed against his back as he folded the robe over a chair, Lupin's hands roaming along his chest. "Damn," Lupin's voice rasped in his ear. "I was hoping for *all* the buttons to be undone."

"Lazy Gryffindor," he grumbled, turning in Lupin's grip so he could taste that hungry mouth again. His hands automatically going to the row of buttons on his vest, even as Lupin batted them away.

Remus kissed Severus eagerly, his hands yanking at the vest until the buttons tore away. He growled softly as his hands encountered more fabric. The dark man was wrapped up tighter than a Christmas present, though the buttons on the oxford gave way much easier than the vest.

"Really, Lupin. Was that necessary," Severus panted, somehow managing to sound put-upon instead of breathless.

Effortlessly - *really need to feed him better* he thought aimlessly - Remus hoisted Severus, carrying him those last few feet to the bed. Severus's arms wrapped around his neck, clinging to him before he let the slighter man fall back on the soft mattress top. He was fairly certain that the look Severus was giving him was meant to be scathing - but with the darker man looking like sin spilt upon the bed it just served as arousing. Severus managed to be an alluring tangle of long limbs and opened clothing that gave up temptingly lurid flashes of skin, and Remus tore at his clothes so he could feel the slighter man underneath him.

Severus groaned low in his throat as Lupin's hands ran almost possessively up his sides, as though taking catalogue of the furrows and ridges of ribs. His fingers threaded through Lupin's hair again, pulling the other down for a broke-open kiss. The werewolf moved readily, lips crushing against his - overly eager in his want - as the other settled heavily against his frame as Severus reminded himself that he *deserved* this one indiscretion, like a spoil of war.

The heat was stifling, and at the same time almost comforting. More than almost comforting. After twenty years of the Wizarding World

being torn asunder by hate, there was almost love there - some hot and headily sticky emotion that filtered in around them in their passion. Fingers catalogued scars, stretched and smoothed over the years from years of growth, of peace; they clutched at skin, nails biting sharp impressions into yielding flesh; they carded through hair and anchored lips.

It was impatient and rushed, slow and worshipping - a reminder they made it. That the world didn't end; that light managed to push a new dawn into society. That it was all well and truly over; that life could finally move on.

They moved together, using blended malt confidence and hazy shadows as an excuse to leave the past in its grave, and Remus hoped to bring about a future. *Yes*, he thought - *a future would be lovely*, with Severus sprawled across his chest, damp breath puffing shakily against his neck. Feeling utterly content, running his fingers slowly along the sharp bite of Severus's scapula, the buttons of his spine, a cut-glass angle of his hip, Remus let himself doze off. *This is lovely* was the last thought that filtered through his mind.

Stretching leisurely an indeterminant time later, Remus sighed contently. He glanced over at Severus, all long, pale lines in the dark bedcovers. Rolling over, he snuggled up to his bedmate, wrapping an arm around that all too thin torso. Pressing his nose to the nape of Severus's neck, he inhaled the almost bitter scent of anise, the darkly spicy scent of cinnamon and cloves. That scent stirred something in him - a sense of belonging perhaps, as dark called to dark.

The looming full moon normally left him feeling restless, but he felt weighted - heavy with satisfaction.

The good thing about the Dungeons was the lack of natural light. There, he could pretend it was still last night; he could convince Severus for another go-around. Slowly, he rested a palm along the other's flank, feeling the delicate bones wrapped up in wiry muscles.

What would it take for this to be every night - for Severus to share his bed for always.

"Really, Lupin," Severus drawled, letting Lupin's large, warm hands skim along his skin. He could almost be lulled into letting the night repeat itself. But of course, without the blended malt depressing his low self-worth, Severus's guard was up. Or rather, was coming up rather quickly, even with that soft, almost loving touch on his skin.

He disentangled himself from the lycanthrope, scooting away on the bed. The remembrance that the full moon was scant hours away weighed heavy on him all of a sudden, reminding him of a rather hungry mouth. But Lupin's teeth had only nipped and worried at his skin; thankfully he felt no actual wounds. He could feel Lupin's fingertips tracing random patterns on his back, following scars; it was startling how easy it would be to be lulled into yet another sleepy, blissful state.

"Come back tonight, after dinner. I'll have the Wolfsbane ready for you," Severus said, his tone clipped as he pulled the duvet over that pale flesh. For a moment, there was no movement from the other side of the bed, but he waited - breath held.

Finally, Remus sighed, slipping out of the warmth of a shared bed and dressing quickly, finding his clothes scattered haphazardly on the floor. He cast a longing look at that dark head, just barely visible over the duvet and heaved a sigh. He'd really rather *not* be tossed out on his arse so early in the morning, but at least the previous night had shown him that Severus wasn't immune to his advances.

Saying a small prayer, Remus slunk from the room, trying his very damnedest to not look as though he was currently on a walk of shame.

Severus rolled over, burying his face in Lupin's fading heat. His body ached pleasantly, and he simply wanted to stay in bed - but he had work to do. There was Wolfsbane to brew, and the term would start soon, meaning he should begin working on his stockroom. Groaning, he scrubbed his hands over his face, and Severus pulled himself from the warm covers and headed for the bathroom.

The rest of the day was spent *fastidiously* trying not to find himself alone with Lupin. Severus forewent all meals in the Great Hall and

kept within his rooms as much as possible. He told himself it was the potion; he needed to devote all his attention to it, to keep that damnable werewolf in fit condition for teaching when the term started.

Of course, he'd had to be trapped in a room with Lupin in order for said lycanthrope to ingest the potion in its entirety for the full week before the moon, which was something Severus only trusted with himself. It was a rather important, final step in keeping Lupin a docile animal rather than a raging beast - which he had seen himself firsthand back in 1976, in 1994.

"Severus," the other started, licking his lips anxiously and grimacing at the bitter taste still lingering on his lips.

"No." A curt reply, sharp and full of a million other words. He stood there, back turned to Lupin, until his office doors clicked shut behind him.

As night fell, he hid in his rooms, watching the clock - seconds ticking past - until moonrise, as was his tradition. Had been his tradition since the Order had reformed, since the war when Lupin and his potion had become one of the only constants in his life. This was the only potion he sometimes worried over, regardless of how much meticulous care and craft he put into it - even if he knew his concerns were false. And he adamantly refused - even to himself - to say he worried for the sake of Lupin.

Severus sipped blended malt by the fire, letting the slow heat burn him from within. He watched the hands of the clock churn, hearing in the depths of his mind Lupin's bones breaking, whimpers, low-seated growls, nails gouging at wood. Blinking, he upturned his glass and drained the amber contents before filling himself another. As he would continue to do until sunrise, when he finally allowed himself to sleep.

The morning following the full moon, his stomach roiled painfully. Gritting his teeth, Severus tried to ignore it, getting out of bed and heading for the bathroom. He pressed a hand to his side. In the bathroom, he selected a pain potion - leftover from the years spent serving two masters, two sides - and upturned the bottle, taking a

healthy swig.

Ignoring the lingering ache in his stomach, Severus turned the taps on the shower and yanked the nightshirt over his head, letting it puddle on the floor at his feet. In the mirror, he caught sight of Lupin's love nips splattered and sucked across his pale skin. Heat flushed through him at the memories and he nearly smiled - nearly - before he caught himself.

"Someone had a lovely time," the mirror crooned, and Severus was certain it was leering at him.

"Shut it," he said wearily, stepping into the shower. It had been a one-time thing. No sense in dwelling on the fuzzy feelings it may or may not have given him. Because as it was, the almost worshipping feel of the lycanthrope's hands on him, possessive in a somehow delicate manner was something he could easily get used to. But he pushed those thoughts away, drawing in a breath and snatching up the rough bar of castile soap.

Scrubbing the washrag over his skin, he was acutely aware as the nausea continued to mount as suds soaked into his skin. Quite honestly, it took him by surprise - the way it pushed at his ribs, heavy and tight. It roiled and twisted in his guts, making his legs quiver. Hand against the slick wall, Severus knelt on the floor. With only the bath steam to witness that weakness, he let himself rest for a second.

Severus drew in a slow breath, chest surging deeply as his lungs filled. He exhaled; breath strung together by water droplets. After years spent torn in half, he had found he could normally sway his body to his mind's logic, willing away unnecessary hurts with deep breathing exercises.

He drew in another moist breath, feeling the steam coat the lining of his chest, his lungs - only to have his salivatory glands to go into overdrive and bile to scorch at his throat. He heaved, a deep and pained sound, as though his body was bound and determined to expel everything he had consumed in the last week. His eyes were squinted shut, but tears managed to seep out anyway. His chest was tight, every breath stilted and serving only to make him retch more.

Coughing wetly, Severus pressed his forehead to the floor, arms quivering pitifully - desperately glad his body had run out of things to give. Spit dribbled from his lips before he was finally able to push himself upward - the water had long run cold. He turned his face into the spray, letting it wash away the sick before he shut it off and staggered from the stall.

"Too much to drink last night, dear," the mirror inquired playfully as he came into view, but he ignored the enchanted glass.

Instead, Severus stumbled to bed, skin cold and wet, and collapsed on top of the covers rather than under them. He buried his nose in Lupin's pillow and pulled the afghan tightly over him.

He made it through three days - *three days* - of bone achingly hurtful retching, wherein the sick had gone from vomit to merely bile and blood and spit. All the leftover potions from his days attending Death Eater meetings, where the Cruciatus Curse had flowed freely, had done little to tamp down the pain. Empty vials were scattered on his dresser, the night table, just as helpful as they'd been with potions in them.

Severus swept the nearest vials to the floor in an angry fit. There was the soft tinkling of glass on the stones of his floor. He sucked in a deep breath; teeth gritted as he glowered at nothing in particular. He ran through a list of potential ailments and found them all lacking.

Groaning, he forced himself to leave the bed and dress.

"That's some nasty hangover," the mirror quipped impishly as Severus positively scrubbed the inside of his mouth with his toothbrush, abusing his gums until there was blood in the sink along with foaming toothpaste. Severus ran fingers through his hair, feeling exhausted and hurt.

He made himself slip up to the Infirmary - scowling hard enough to deter attention from his colleagues and ghosts alike, thoroughly scaring the prefects who traipsed in the halls, waiting for the term to begin. As it was, Severus found himself grateful for the nearly empty corridors which would within the week be flooded with the

returning students.

In the Infirmary, Severus shut the door loudly enough behind him to draw Poppy from her office, even as he briskly made his way to the backroom that he had claimed as his own for all those years under Voldemort's reign. The room was a place for his weaknesses to be laid bare, counted, addressed in an unspoken request for treatment.

Grimacing, Severus sat down on the bed and peered up at the whitewashed ceiling, waiting for the mediwitch to join him with fingers knotted sharply over his thighs in a meager attempt to keep the nausea and pain in check.

"Really Severus. I thought what with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named finally being gone, you'd get out of the habit of sulking up here in pain," Poppy chided playfully as she approached the bed, giving him a visual once-over. "You look fine."

Hands smoothed, firmly planted on his knees as he gave her a pitiful excuse for a scowl. "Yes, well. I've been throwing up blood for the last three days, so I don't exactly feel fine."

"Oh dear, you poor love. All right, lie back."

He did as she asked, gritting his teeth as nausea swamped him. Squeezing his eyes tightly shut, Severus tried not to focus overly much on his salvia glands going into overdrive - a sure indication he was on his way to yet another trip to the bathroom. There was the slight tingle of magic as Poppy ran her wand over his form, a basic inquisitive spell to find out what ailed him.

How ironic, he thought to himself, letting his lips curl at the corners. *To have survived two wars, a cruel lord twice, only to perish from an illness I can't sate.*

"Oh dear," Poppy said again - her tone an odd combination of confusion and concern.

Severus opened his eyes abruptly, pinning her with a dark stare. "What," he bit out, pushing himself back up into a sitting position.

"Well Severus - it says you're uhm . . . that you're . . . well, pregnant."

"That . . . that's *impossible*," he snarled, feeling his cheeks flush. Pain jolted through his system as he forced himself off the bed, glowering at nothing in particular. *Damned werewolf*, he scowled, forcing his spine to straighten in spite of the pain in his stomach.

"I do know how to cast that particular spell, Severus. I assure you," she said haughtily.

Pushing past Poppy with a snort, he made a hasty retreat for the door.

"Severus," she called after him, stopping him in his tracks. For a moment, he was hopeful she would confess it was all a joke. "Try chamomile tea with honey, or perhaps peppermint?"

Giving a jerky nod, he rushed from the Infirmary and headed straight for the library. He proceeded to hole himself up in the very back corner, amongst cobwebs and forgotten languages, and scour the thickest, most comprehensive texts about dark creatures.

There was a lovely little spiel about being bonded for life - which he knew outright was a lie - and all the lovely things it would entail, least of which included intense desire for closeness, perception to Lupin's emotions, the wolf bending to his whims.

"Utter drivel," he ground out, flipping through pages more frantically now, swallowing hard at the panic that was rising in his chest. Lycanthropy pregnancies weren't exactly rare, but neither were they the most common way of passing the curse along. Which was decidedly bad for Severus, as he flipped through dusty old books looking for some kind of explanation other than that he was good and royally fucked.

Everything pointed toward the full moon - the closer it was during . . . consummation, the higher the chances for pregnancy, whether his body was equipped for the job or not. Regardless of that fact, the common denomination seemed to be an extraordinarily high-risk pregnancy - the baby being a parasite in the truest of forms.

His heart bottomed out into his stomach, which promptly dropped a few more feet.

The likelihood of both him *and* the babe making it through the next forty weeks, give or take, would be slim . . . nigh impossible. The nausea would not abate, it would remain consistent throughout the whole stint, until his insides were raw. Sometime in his second trimester, it was entirely possible that the baby could simply die - rotting away in his body, poisoning him. Loss of consciousness, fevers, his body breaking at the slightest grievances - all the joys of his fate.

The last three weeks would be those things times ten.

When the baby was finally due, there was a high risk for excessive blood loss, coma, death - especially without the appropriate care. Fifty fifty chance the baby would be born alive only to expire mere seconds after the first breath of air filled its lungs; fifty fifty chance the baby would be born infected.

Growling, he slammed the book shut and clenched cold fingers into fists hard enough to turn his knuckles white. He had *survived* and now this. Now. This. All because of one stupid fucking night, when he'd finally let himself be tempted. Where he'd finally given into Lupin's soft smiles and almost caring gazes. *Stupid, stupid, stupid* - he groaned internally, feeling his entire body cinch painfully tight. He abruptly stood, the heavy chair squealing backwards in protest. Severus had half the mind to leave the dusty old tomes where they sat, certain no one would look for them, but was unable.

Scowling to himself, Severus thumped the dark books back into their rightful places. His fingers rested wearily on their battered spines.

"Oh, there you are."

His scowl deepened at that voice - the tone he wanted to hear least of all.

"What do you want, Lupin," he bit out, glaring ineffective daggers at the books, unwilling to turn around and face the root of his

problems.

"Brushing up on dark creatures," Lupin almost purred. "Anything in particular? Lunar cycles, things that go woof in the night?"

Severus jerked around, stepping closer to the shelves to put space between them while he glared at the werewolf. Battered old spines pressed lovingly against his back. The intimacy between them was still too fresh, his body still holding markings of their union, and it took everything he had to not flush. Lupin had a fading bruise at the hollow of his throat, and he vaguely remembered putting it there.

"I'll have you know, you insufferable cur, *someone* has to keep you and your kind tame," he spat out.

There was malice there, overly loud in his tone - a blatant reminder to Lupin that Severus was nothing if not as dark, perhaps darker than the easily cowed lycanthrope. His darkness being born of his soul, not some unfortunate childhood incident. But all the same - Lupin leaned in closer, a hand spreading on the books just next to Severus's head, as if the malice was nothing but cold honey, pulling him in, sticking him in place. The werewolf leaned in, dangerously close to edging in on Severus's personal space.

"And the world thanks you for your efforts," Lupin offered with a wolfish grin. "Would thank you even more if you were to agree to drinks with me . . . tonight? After dinner?" There was a hopeful lilt to that tone, and Severus could almost pretend that Lupin meant it.

"In that, the world will just have to wait until the sun burns out, I should think," he drawled, tone low and dangerous. Mostly for himself - after all, it would do no good to allow himself to be bundled off the werewolf's rooms for Circe's sake. He was *pregnant*.

Lupin leaned just a bit closer, his hand slipping and pushing a few books from their shelves. Severus startled, leaning away as much as the bookcase behind him would allow and scowling deeply.

"You *oaf*," he bit out, body twisting as if to escape the almost possessive bracketing of Lupin's arm around him to retrieve the

books, only for recently appointed prefect Thomas Ainsley to come around the shelves, books held in his arms and as fearsome a scowl as possible on the fresh-faced youth.

"Sir," the Fifth Year finally managed, eyes blinking rapidly in surprise, and Severus could see the venom the boy had gathered at the tip of his tongue dry.

Severus reached out and took the books from the boy. "Mister Ainsley." He could see the curious look on the student's face, the other's gaze darting between him and Lupin as though Ainsley would receive an explanation - which he would not. "How was your summer."

"Fine, Sir. Ready to take on my responsibilities as a prefect."

He made a quiet noise low in his throat as he reshelved the tomes. "Even though it means giving up the last week of your break?"

The youth gave him a bright and eager smile. "Yes, Sir. Thank you for this opportunity."

"Professor Lupin was a prefect. Perhaps he would regale you with prefect stories of our youth." There was a shocked noise behind him, as Lupin realized he was being pawned off; likewise, there was a similar noise from Ainsley. And Severus felt like patting himself on the back.

Instead, he smoothed the spines of the tomes perfectly straight and gave a spluttering, confused Lupin a glare before fleeing from the library, leaving both unwanted visitors behind, and promptly hiding himself away in his rooms for the rest of the evening.

He hid away for a week - for the first time in so very long missing the Sorting and Welcoming Feast, and instead curled up in bed with thick covers and self-loathing, leaving only to rush to the bathroom and retch. He shooed the owls away, leaving correspondences unread, unanswered. Finally, the house elves began to pop in, leaving him little notes from Dumbledore, from Poppy, from Lupin.

Finally, Severus dragged himself from the bed. He made himself

shower, scrubbing hard at his skin and hair to wash away the grime and sweat and self-hate. He made himself dress, doing every single damn button by hand rather than magic, drawing his defenses and resolve around him. Every button done made him feel stronger, impenetrable.

He made himself leave his room.

And he made himself take tea with Poppy in her quaint little office at the back of the Infirmary.

"So, you've laid down with Remus," Poppy finally muttered into the hush between them, taking a sip of her tea. Severus wanted to blanche at the statement, accuse her of making wild accusations, and to deny the whole thing. But he would have been a fool to think she wouldn't have done some digging of her own. After all - it wasn't every day that something like male pregnancy wandered into the Infirmary.

"One-time thing," he muttered drily, sipping his tea while his stomach quietly rebelled.

She tutted softly, "A one-time thing that very well could kill you."

He sniffed in disdain. "Really now," he drawled slowly. "If a dark lord couldn't manage that, why do you think a bundle of toxic cells could." The bravado was false, leaving a bitter taste in his mouth. And they both knew it. But Poppy remained silent, and Severus merely tightened his grip on his teacup and willed it not to quiver as he lifted it to his mouth.

"Does he . . . know?" Poppy gave him a look, heavy with implications. And Severus nearly spit out his tea, clenching his lips tightly shut to keep it in.

"No. He does not."

"Perhaps. . ." she stopped again, setting her teacup down on the small table between them, the look on her face sincere and thoughtful.

Severus was rather curious to see what she would say - and of

course he was. Over the years, he and Poppy had managed to be as close to friends as a man such as himself was capable of being. They had worked together often to keep the Infirmary in running order - he had only ever supplied the best potions. Not to mention, she was one of the only people to ever see him creep back to Hogwarts, broken and bloodied.

So, when she said, "Perhaps you should give thought to . . . aborting this whole endeavor," he was utterly shocked.

Not that the thought hadn't crossed his mind, but rather that he had never expected Poppy Pomfrey to tell him that maybe abortion would be the best route entirely. She doted on the students, tutted over them when they'd come for care. It was . . . an interesting idea that she would even consider the notion.

"Excuse me," he said softly, his tone curious and low.

Poppy waved a hand animatedly between them. "Oh, come on, Severus! You know what I'm saying. If Remus doesn't know about the baby, then perhaps you save yourself - and him - a lot of trouble." Her tone softened, her features rounded as she looked at him. "I've seen you hurt quite a bit these last years, Severus, and I rather thought we were done with that. I don't like seeing my friends in pain."

He was silent for a moment, staring down into the murky brown of his tea. The color, the scent did nothing for his ever-constant nausea. Severus wrinkled his nose and placed the teacup down on Poppy's desk. Which the mediwitch seemed to take as disgust at her statement, as Poppy's hand was suddenly curled around his now empty hand. She backtracked on her words, as if she needed to explain it away.

"Severus . . . I'm merely suggesting that you think of *yourself* first, for once, my dear."

The sigh whispered over his lips, and he waved her words away. Because, as it was, Poppy didn't need to explain herself to him - not when Severus had thought the same, if only fleetingly. "I had - thought about it. An option, as it were."

Suddenly, he found he needed something to do with his hands, and he picked his teacup up once more. His fingers clenched around the thin porcelain, taking solace in the heat that permeated into his skin.

"Right now, it's still just a bundle of cells, Severus. It's not a baby, it hasn't formed. And I know there are potions you've brewed before for instances such as this. Well - not quite like this, but . . ."

"Poppy," he finally said. Severus once more put his teacup down and clasped his hands in his lap, fingers knotting together. Mindlessly he picked at a thumbnail, feeling the dent there where the nail had broken well past the thumb tip and regrown misshapenly. She fell silent, looking at him expectantly.

"I . . . I think I want to keep it." It came out more of a question than he intended, and he snorted at himself, suddenly angry. This was a time to be decisive, not a swaying decision made over tea. He was talking about a *child*, for Circe's sake. He clenched his jaw, teeth gritting together - he was anything *but* indecisive, had always had to be. So, Severus drew in a deep breath through his nose and lifted his gaze to meet Poppy's.

"Twenty years have seen so much death - I've seen so much death and pain, been privy to it, aided it in the worst way. How. . ." his voice failed him finally.

She was watching him, and then reached across the desk to hold his hand. "It's all right, love. It'll be fine."

Of course, Severus was not fool enough to believe that piddly little lie, but he refrained from scowling.

"Every week. You will come see me *every bloody week* so I can check you and that baby over. Do you hear me, Severus Snape."

He managed to pick up his tea once more, taking a sip of the brightly cold liquid. "Yes, of course."

The silence fell softly, leaving him too full of thoughts, even as Poppy filled his now empty cup.

"I think you should tell the Headmaster," Poppy almost whispered, as if now that he had made his decision, the whole situation was worthy of note. "You'll need extensive care - if you're certain you want to keep it," she finally said, her lips pursed in a disapproving manner.

"On the contrary. I don't feel as though this is his business in any way or form."

"He's going to find out eventually. At *some point*, you will be very pregnant and then shortly after you will have a child. And *Remus* - are you going to tell him? People need to know, Severus. It will make itself known."

Cup still half-full, Severus set it down on the desk between them. "I have some marking to do, Poppy. And I suddenly find myself tired. I shall see you in a week, then." His reply was curt, he knew, but softly spoken to try and preserve the friendship. They both knew he liked his privacy.

She simply made a noncommittal noise in the back of her throat, her nearly disapproving gaze suddenly lost out over the quidditch pitch.

He excused himself out. In his rooms, he paced. He took a mouthful of blended malt and let it sit - heavy and bitter - on his tongue merely for the taste, before spitting it into the fireplace. He wondered how long it would be before Poppy finally spilled his little secret.

Every meal that followed was tense, like a miasma that spilled out into the Great Hall - in a way he hadn't felt since Voldemort had fallen. Constantly, Severus felt on edge, as though waiting for the other shoe to drop.

On top of it, the nausea limited what he could eat - or try to eat - sticking with soups and dry bread. The heady scents were too much, but there were only so many meals he could miss before others came looking for him. Severus kept his head bent, choosing not to converse as though he could make his stomach behave through willpower alone. And of course, he ignored pointed looks from

Lupin and Minerva.

Every meal, he left at the earliest possible moment - waiting until dessert appeared, begging off coffee, and heading for his rooms.

It took a week and a half, as it turned out - ten days - before the statement was uttered, damning him.

"Severus - a word after dinner, please," Dumbledore muttered softly from the center of the table, as he got up to leave the Hall. "Perhaps tea. In my office." The sly look he received was an executioner's gaze. All at once, he had been tried, judged, and sentenced.

But he simply returned to his rooms. And he waited. After twenty years, Severus was well aware that Dumbledore would wait up for him.

The ever-constant nausea threatened upheaval, roiling in his guts - and he barely made it into the bathroom before he promptly lost what meager foodstuffs he had picked aimlessly at during dinner. Clutching at the rim of the toilet seat, he retched, throat already raw as his stomach flexed hard enough as though it could expel the fetus out his mouth.

"You poor dear," the mirror tutted, as Severus spat the last dribble of bile from his lips. He got to his feet and rinsed his mouth with cold water, spitting it into the sink - watching as it sluggishly crept toward the drain.

"Yes well - it'll get worse before it gets better."

Straightening his clothes, Severus decided to walk to the Headmaster's office rather than Floo, thinking that it would give his stomach time to settle. He scowled darkly, determined to make everyone he ran across as miserable as himself.

But - by the grace of Circe, he encountered no one.

"Chocolate frogs," he bit out to the statue, watching as it withdrew and allowed him entrance. Up the stairs, his fingers gripping tight at the wall. Nausea, his constant companion, roiled in his stomach. He could do this, or so he kept telling himself.

Before he reached the top step, he stopped, and Severus spread his fingers against his stomach. For a second, he was able to pretend it was still barren - as it should be - and that the nausea was due to nerves. That he and Dumbledore would only have a chat about curriculum and his treatment of the students.

Sucking in a deep breath, he approached the door - which opened before he could knock.

Dumbledore sat behind his desk; McGonagall hovered just over his shoulder. Unexpected, but not really. Severus tightened his lips into an almost scowl and stepped into the room.

He stood in the middle of the room; arms crossed over his chest defensively. "Headmaster, Professor McGonagall." And he waited.

"Severus, my dear boy. Sit down, won't you?" An order wrapped up in a soft request.

"No. I rather think I'll stand." A quiet reminder that he no longer - truly - had to take orders.

The silence droned on, each new second of it making Severus's skin crawl. Those damnable blue eyes were twinkling at him, and he ground his teeth. All anxious energy, he began to pace, scowling at nothing in particular.

"Severus, you really should sit," Dumbledore said again, voice plying and warm.

"*She told you. Just admit it,*" he bit out, rounding on the pair, all seething anger and hurt. It had been inevitable of course, Poppy spilling his secret, but this . . . toying around it was too much. He'd much rather the whole thing just be confronted rather than left a dirtily hidden away secret - like everything else that involved the four original golden children of the house known as Gryffindor.

"*Talk*." It was his turn to order, to demand - and after twenty years of being twisted and manipulated, the bitten off growl was catharsis.

"Perhaps a lemon drop and some tea before we speak, my dear

boy?" Yet another soft order wrapped up in a softer request.

Angrily, he spun on his heel and glowered at them both. "A *lemon drop*? With its Calming Draught coating that *I* brew. I should think *not*, Headmaster."

"Really, Severus. Just sit down. We can talk about this like adults," Minerva stated, calm in the face of Severus's hurt - learned through twenty years of close interaction, even more years of dealing with his moods. She appeared able to overlook the hurt, even as it coiled between them like a wounded snake, angry and ready to strike.

And it did - strike.

"What? About how I sullied one of the *original* Golden Children of Gryffindor?" He was seething, cornered and vulnerable - a dark creature caged in by their words. "Want me to tell you all the details - Merlin knows we've seen enough these last twenty years; what's a little dirt amongst friends."

"We're worried about *you*, Severus," Minerva finally shouted at him, her fingers gripping white-knuckled on Dumbledore's desk. "You bloody idiot! Just fucking sit!"

Swallowing roughly, Severus sat - his entire body a tautly pulled cord. The nausea churned, rough and unforgiving. Minerva took the seat next to him, her hands reaching out and falling pitifully short.

"Oh Severus, did he hurt you," she finally asked, as if she were admitted all the sins of Black and his lot in a single breath.

And he found he wanted to cry. It was too much all at once. Lupin, the pregnancy, the concern and care.

"No," he finally bit out, chest tightening painfully as he remembered Lupin's near worshipping touches.

"Poppy informs us you're - ah . . . expecting," Dumbledore said softly, his face nearly crumpling in its loving expression. "That you'll be needing lots of care, dear boy."

"I'll manage," Severus uttered drily, not at all keen on sharing his

rooms with an overbearing house elf.

"It's not about managing," Minerva said, her voice sharp and just shy of a harpy's pitch. "This is a miracle," she said, her fingers gesturing toward his abdomen vaguely - which was entirely the opposite of he felt, as sitting there he began to feel as though the babe was really an abomination. "Severus, you should be cared for . . . loved," she said finally. "Does Remus even know? You're having his child, after all."

It was spoken between them like a dirty secret, and he flinched.

"No, he doesn't know," he finally said, tongue much too thick for more of a remark. There was the mounting desire to tell them he didn't *want* to tell Lupin - to see that Gryffindorish stupidity rear up and declare they marry, spend a life together, create a false reality for a baby neither expected nor planned for. He had spent his entire life attempting to avoid being a burden, only to propel himself thoroughly into that position after one night of stupidity. The thought of it crushed its way past his ribs, his sternum, and buried sharply in the damp walls of his chest - choking him.

Minerva was looking at him earnestly, and he was certain Poppy had confessed his secret to her and not Dumbledore. Her hand finally curled around his forearm, and she leaned forward just slightly. And Severus was suddenly he was cautious of the words that would spill from her lips.

"All right, that's all right Severus," she told him softly, pointedly ignoring the punched-out noise that Albus emitted. "Poppy and I will take care of you, then."

"I think I'll retire for the evening," Severus said softly, suddenly more hurt than he'd been. Minerva and Dumbledore looked at him as though him leaving was the biggest mistake, but still he took his leave.

He hunkered down in the Dungeons and thought long and hard about the endeavor he was fixing to go on.
****
A/N: I hope your prepared for this one. Its gonna be a long one

hopefully with a sequel. Im getting out of school June 23 so Ill be updating more and more as time goes on. Ill try to update a chapter once a day while trying to keep up my oneshot book also. Hope you enjoy.

4 Weeks- Your Baby is the Size of a Poppyseed

A/N: Before I begin I would like to say that I apologize in advance if I get a few things wrong in this story. I do not know much about pregnancies or the babies growth rate during the time. Also this is a short chapter I was fairly tired today and didn't want to write. But I decided to get a quick one out. Sorry to disappoint.
****

"You're supposed to gain some weight during pregnancy, Severus - not lose it," Poppy tutted softly.

Severus was laid back in the spare bed, tucked away in what used to be *his* room in the Infirmary - for those nights when Voldemort had left him a plaything for the others, broken at his mind and body relentlessly. Robes, vest, and shirt had been discarded. He glowered down at his stomach, still slightly concave, framed with the sharp edges of his ribs.

"Bloody hard to *gain* weight if you can't keep anything down," he snarled, trying to force the nausea down to a manageable hum - and failing.

"Still nauseous, then? Is the tea helping?" Her hands prodded gently at his stomach, as though she could feel where the sickness boiled just underneath his skin. As though she could simply pluck the bundle of cells from his entrails.

"Circe, no; not helping," he ground out, while it felt like his skin would crawl off his bones.

"Severus?"

"What," he barked, his fingers white-knuckled on the sheets, arms quivering finely.

Poppy sat back, smiling softly at him. "Your baby is the size of a poppy seed, now. Did you know that?"

Your baby.

He swallowed hard, as suddenly - the whole thing seemed so much more real. Severus managed to make a noncommittal noise high in his throat.

"Yes, well. How lovely," he sneered. "Do I meet your expectations of health? May I *go* now."

"Hmm? Yes. Though I really wish you'd gain some weight - you've always been too thin," she told him as he dressed. "Protein shakes, maybe - Muggle concoctions for muscle mass."

Snorting derisively, he took his leave - hurrying from the Infirmary as quickly as the churning in his guts would allow. And promptly nearly ran into Lupin as he rounded a corner. He drew himself up to his full height, arms crossed over his chest, while he sneered at the lighter man.

"Oh, Severus!" Lupin's eyes lit up, and Severus had this funny hum at the back of his head. "Hello." The smile was implied in every syllable Lupin spoke and would have made itself know had it not been etched on every line of his face.

"Lupin," he acknowledged drily, before making to move past the werewolf. Fingers curled around his wrist, tugging him back into place. That hazy feeling made itself even more apparent - in retaliation, he glowered angrily at Lupin.

"I was thinking . . . drinks, perhaps?" The question was soft, lilting.

"No. I rather think *not*, Lupin."

"Another time, then?" The question, though softer this time, was impatient, unwilling to be ignored.

Severus made a noncommittal noise low in his throat, striding past the lighter man with purpose.

And that purpose, as it turned out, was to return to his rooms and promptly offer his lunch as a sacrifice to porcelain gods. Finally giving into the nausea, he retched for what felt like a small eternity - until his throat burned and all the muscles in his body quivered weakly.

Limply, Severus curled on his side, the tile floor cool against his fevered skin. He panted, each breath making him feel more and more like something was crawling all over him. Thankfully, the mirror stayed quiet, and he undressed as quickly as his unbending fingers would allow.

He crawled into the shower, letting the cool water splash over him as he huddled on the floor of the stall. Severus drew in deep, almost calming breaths through his nose, forehead pressed to slick tile. His stomach still churned, but he'd ran out of things to give. There had been blood in the bile, at the end of it once the contents of his stomach had been emptied, once the heaves had seemingly tried to tear his soul free.

"I'd *gladly* welcome the Dark Lord for tea and a quick *crucio* if it meant not throwing up for a year," he muttered, eyes closing against the discomfort. The shower spray washed away unforgiving tears, lingering on his cheeks.

Minutes passed, and he laid there - quietly collecting his waning strength. Slowly - oh so slowly - he uncurled his frame from underneath the now cold spray and dragged himself to bed, determined to sleep for the remainder of the week - if only his body would let him.

5 Weeks - Your baby is the size of an apple seed

He sat ramrod straight in the teacher's lounge, listening as Albus droned on about something, gestured wildly at Hagrid – who looked at least somewhat embarrassed. Curious, Severus gave Minerva a look, who merely rolled her eyes . . . telling him it was perfectly fine to Severus to continue being disengaged to the matters of the staff meeting.

Which would have been his course of action regardless, as a sharp roil of his guts made him bite the inside of his cheek hard enough to draw blood. Severus kept his face perfectly schooled, his nostrils flaring slightly being the only outward sign of discomfort should someone look close enough to notice. Because only by Circe's grace did he manage to keep the grimace from his face. Which was preposterous, because how many times had he sat in that chair following a long, *long* night with the Dark Lord being torn down and rebuilt only to be torn down once more.

Because a few *cramps* shouldn't be on par with his throat burred raw from swallowed screams and his skin ringed with bruises. Shouldn't be on par with having to suffer through the almost-always pointless meeting after sleepless nights, where shadows had stuck heavily to his thoughts.

How many times had he *bled* in that chair, feeling scabs cracking open and wounds oozing wetly, sticking him in place? How many times had he had to sit perfectly still so not to jostle ribs or more . . . sensitive areas? How often had he had to blink and breathe slowly, methodically to keep himself in the present, to keep him from slipping back to that place of nightmares – to remind himself he survived another night, another rousing court with the Dark Lord?

No – cramps should not be on par with the Hell he had suffered willingly as penance . . . but somehow, they were. Damn it all – they were.

He exhaled a bit more forcefully than he intended, managing to call Lupin's attention to him – that bright lick of curiosity along his skull. And apparently the attention of all other staff in attendance.

"Severus. Something to add," Albus asked genuinely interested, and across the room Minerva smirked at him. He cut a glare in her direction.

"Albus. We're barely into the term – hedging on a month at full capacity of the student body. Do you really think we need a monthly meeting to discuss . . ." he trailed off, waving his hand vaguely in Albus's and Hagrid's direction. "This."

"Don't mind him, Albus. You know Severus is already drowning in marking," Pomona quipped from across the room with a wide grin, earning snickers around the room. Causing him to huff once more, eyes rolling in almost agitation.

"Merely because I'm not particularly keen on my Dungeons being blown up. Or wasted time." A pointed look in Dumbledore's direction.

That earned him a round of snickers on his own.

"Severus, surely Hagrid deserves recognition for running out that lot of imps," Lupin spoke up from his corner, and Severus chose to overlook him. Instead turning his attention to Hagrid.

"I commend Hagrid for everything he does – I believe we are . . . quite useful to one another." Earning him a nod from the half-giant. A cramp tore again at his insides, and Severus drew in a slow breath. "So, while I am grateful to Hagrid for ridding us of those nasty imps, I also have rather pressing business to attend to."

He pushed himself to his feet and waited a moment, gaze moving from Albus to Hagrid in question.

"Dun ferget 'bout those flobberworms I got fer ya, professor," Hagrid reminded him softly, head ducking as he seemed to pull into himself like a collapsing star, just as heavy.

"I will collect them as soon as I finish the doxycide for you."

Hagrid nodded almost timidly, eyes downcast as though trying to sink into the chair, to make his hulking mass smaller somehow – less in Severus's space. And Severus sighed, because he would always be treated with care, with distance like Albus's dangerous pet. Because while they could all *almost* joke around, they couldn't because they knew what Severus was, what he was capable of . . . and that stayed all thoughts of almost friendship.

In a flurry of robes, he left, letting the door close overly loud behind him. His footfalls echoing loudly off the corridor walls, an indication of his mood.

"Severus," Lupin called behind him, following him as he took his exit from the lounge and headed for the Dungeons. "A moment? Please?"

He allowed himself to come to a stop, fingers nearly fluttering out to rest against the nearest wall – to keep himself stable. Angrily, he gritted his teeth in what he hoped was a foreboding scowl rather than a muted grimace.

"What, Lupin."

The lighter man approached him; face broken out in a soft grin. "Haven't had much time to talk with you." *Circe help me*, he thought as the werewolf's tone broke. "Is ah – is everything okay?" The question ended with Lupin awkwardly rubbing the back of his neck.

"Okay," Severus asked incredulously – it hadn't been the question he had almost come to expect.

"Yes – I figured . . . well, I don't know," Lupin choked out, words falling short into the silence that crashed between them.

Cocking a dark brow, Severus let his face shift from slightly inconvenienced to a near scowl. "Eloquent, as always, Lupin," he sneered, letting his lip curl softly at the end of the sentence.

"Just . . . you've been rather busy lately." A soft, almost imperceptible whine accompanied yet another awkward rub to the back of Lupin's neck. "I thought – oh I don't know . . . drinks . . .

something?" The word *anything* remained unspoken between them.

"Lupin," he drawled, his tone a deadpan even as neediness hummed brightly at the back of his skull. "I will spend this week preparing the *only* potion that will keep you even somewhat human for the full moon. My most sincere apologies if I haven't had time for . . . drinks." He bit the word out, watching as the edges of Lupin's face drooped. "If you'd rather run around naked, a complete *animal*, I'd prefer you find another place to live and work."

The lycanthrope's shoulders sagged, leaving Severus feeling victorious. "Tonight, seven o'clock sharp," he snapped out, giving Lupin a look that dared him to be late.

Severus marched off, forcing his spine ramrod straight even as his stomach continued to twist and coil behind his navel like a living thing. But in his rooms, he found he nearly had to crawl to the bathroom. He retched almost softly; his body well exhausted beyond its means. Laid upon the floor, he thought curiously of the steady hum of sensation at the back of his skull – surely not his emotions, and it was fairly simple to guess who they belonged to, especially as the werewolf tended to wear his heart on his sleeve.

"So that's true," he muttered aloud, gasping in a sharp breath as a particularly vicious cramp settled in his abdomen. Severus grimaced. An unwavering tie to Lupin – just another one. Another complication in the whole matter.

He heaved a sigh, struggled to his feet as gracefully as he could – a tangle of long limbs and robes – and headed into the bedroom. Severus removed his outer robes, wordlessly magicking the buttons open, and draped it over the back of a chair. Rolling his shirtsleeves up, he headed into his laboratory, setting his workstation up. Stilling for a moment, he looked downward and caught sight of the faded, blurred Dark Mark, and sucked in a deep breath. Blinking slowly, he drew in a deep breath and put the mark out of his mind, refocusing on the task at hand.

Severus caught himself nearly humming as he turned the cauldron just another inch, even though it had absolutely nothing to do with how *well* the potion was made and everything to do with his own

sense of perfection whilst brewing.

Severus lost himself in the mechanicalness of the act, fingers moving on instinct as he prepped his ingredients – the obsidian blade sharp enough to whisper through herbs and roots effortlessly.

At the first rest period, in which the Wolfsbane bubbled to a precise shade of pale lavender, Severus touched his stomach cautiously – the thought of perhaps eventually needing to prepare two batches coiled amongst his other rather mundane thoughts. He had enough time to put on the kettle, a distraction in itself from the lingering wave of sickness. Severus let his mind narrow only to the soft black enamel of the kettle, willing it to whistle faster as he scooped a spoonful of peppermint tea into his cup. The whistle of the kettle calmed his nerves, though his hands shook finely as he poured the water over the leaves. He gripped at the handle of his cup, long fingers turning white-knuckled.

He gritted his teeth and returned to the potion.

At the second rest period, in which the potion boiled for exactly five minutes, a prompt return of his nausea sent him wheeling into the bathroom. Severus hurled, shoulders curling as he gripped the toilet seat – expelling his tea, heaving until he thought his ribs might pop.

But with no time to dwell, he hurried back to the potion – just as the timer chimed softly.

Exhausted, he slumped against the workbench, ladling the potion into Lupin's chalice. Severus had skipped dinner – as he always did during this period, though he couldn't much see the point in dinner anymore. Especially not if all he was meant to do was consume and expel within minutes.

A knock, a bade to enter, and one seemingly very concerned lycanthrope later – Severus waved off the niceties.

"Lupin. You're not here to partake in my company. You are merely here to consume your potion and leave," he said with a snort, unable to manage even enough venom for a sneer.

He watched attentively as Lupin swallowed the Wolfsbane, certain that every drop disappeared. The other was grimacing, loudly complaining – “Gods, that tastes awful” – as Lupin set the chalice down. Those hazel eyes turned to him then, expectantly.

“Are you all right, Severus? You look . . . sick,” Lupin finally offered up, having searched for the right word and found all the other words in his vocabulary to be lacking, Severus assumed.

Heaving a heavy sigh through his nose, Severus gave a dry twist of a not-quite scowl, waving the other off. “Yes, yes – I’m fine. Tomorrow, same time – don’t be late” he said, a sharp dismissal.

Suddenly, all he could think about was his bed.

Severus watched as Lupin took his leave, the werewolf glancing over his shoulder twice in the time it took for him to get to the office door. The heady thrum of – something, an emotion Severus refused to acknowledge as it wasn’t his, flailed against the back of his skull. The door shut firmly behind Lupin; he dragged his weary body to bed.

Four more days – exactly like the first. Brewing through dinner, a knock, a bade to enter, a grimace, niceties, that feeling humming at the back of his skull. Although, Severus knew exactly what that unwelcome, unowned feeling of Lupin’s was by the second day – pining – he continued to ignore it; he continued to promptly throw the werewolf out after the other had consumed the dregs of the chalice.

The night of the full moon – rather than spent sipping expensive liquor as he was wont to do – was spent in the bathroom. His long body, as he found out, could curl around the toilet’s base, allowing him the comfort of the cold dungeon floor and the closeness if he felt he’d be sick again.

“Have you seen someone about this sickness,” the mirror tutted, and he ignored it.

His jaw ached, as though unyielding fingers had held it pried open far too long. Letting his head loll against the floor, Severus closed

his eyes and tried to force himself to sleep. It was evasive.

Sometime past sunrise – he knew, as time had failed miserably to escape his notice – he unfurled from his position on the floor and managed his way into the shower. There was a quiet and miserable irony in the fact they were both suffering due to Lupin's disease. He leaned against the cold tile, letting the water sluice over him. The spray was blessedly cool against his flushed skin, and he simply stood.

When he finally left his rooms, Severus headed directly to the Infirmary. He stood by Poppy's desk, a mere shadow, while she attended to a student – who was shooting him terrified glances. The grimace on the child's face, Severus wagered, could be equal parts due to his presence as it was to Poppy setting the shoulder that was twisted out of the socket.

"Really, Severus. I thought you weren't coming," she told him sharply, hurrying him into the back room once the student had left.

"Full moon – occupied," he nearly mumbled. Even his tongue was exhausted, and that simply would not do. *Severus Snape*, he told himself, *does not mumble*.

He rather hurried to undress to the waist, stopping only to touch a palm to his forehead, eyes squinted shut. And while Poppy was blessedly silent through it all, he could feel her eyes on him – nothing escaping her notice.

"How's the nausea," she asked once he'd laid back – as though asking about the weather, and not the crippling ache that gripped his stomach.

"Bad." The word was sharp, bitten off – and falling horribly short of how bad it was.

"You look pale . . . and thin," she groused, her hands hovering over his stomach. Still concave, still framed by the sharp teeth of ribs. "And you've been skipping dinner."

"Full moon – occupied," Severus said again, tone droll at the

reminder – cruelly enough, it felt also like an almost promise.

Poppy tutted, fingers nearly rough in their prodding.

“I’m not sleeping,” he finally said, breathing the words out as he stared up at the towering ceiling. “It’s more like collapsing, like my body has simply given up all it has to offer and has to shut off.” Speaking the words aloud, he felt a tiny bubble of something much like fear – that way of resting, he’d come to know it intimately during the twenty years prior, during the Wars. And Poppy knew that.

“And the sleeping draughts aren’t helping,” she finished for him – they’d gone this way before. “I’m sorry, love. I . . .” *tried to warn you from all this* remained unspoken.

“Indeed,” Severus drawled, the word dry as it fell from his lips – a response to the spoken and unspoken statements. “Simply wanted it to let it be known. I’m sure you’re giving reports to the Headmaster.”

Poppy smiled, “I am. He worries about you, you know. Always has.”

“Albus likes to meddle,” he said snarkily, dressing swiftly. He had a class at nine, which was rapidly approaching, which meant no attempt at breakfast.

“Severus,” Poppy finally said, calling his attention to her as he did up the last button on his teaching robes. He made a noise of inquiry in his throat, eyebrow cocking upward as she gave him a simper of a smile. It was a tender expression, unexpected and soft.

“Your baby is now the size of an apple seed.”

A twinge in his throat, Severus tilted his head. “Mm, quite.” Quickly, he left the room, hurrying – he had some First Years to terrify, if only to make his world right again.

6 Week - Your baby is the size of a sweet pea

"Severus, my dear boy - some tea," Dumbledore asked from the doorway, his tone brooking no argument - as though this was a pleasant surprise, and not as though Severus had been called from his marking at the beck of the Headmaster.

"No, thank you," he replied curtly, allowing his body to fold into the chair across from Dumbledore.

"I have peppermint," the Headmaster lilted, head canted invitingly.

He sighed. "One cup, then."

Dumbledore smiled victoriously, as a house elf appeared moments later with tea and crumpets. Staring at the unassuming cakes, he could almost taste them - which not only made him hungry, it made him nauseous. Severus gratefully took the proffered teacup, knuckles clenched tight around the handle. He took a sip, letting the taste wash over his tongue. The bright taste soothed the sick feeling churning in his stomach, briefly. He'd found that peppermint worked better than chamomile - but neither worked quite as well as he'd have liked.

"You have Poppy rather worried, dear boy." Albus said, nibbling at a crumpet and watching him attentively. "Perhaps . . . you could let her know it's not as bad as it seems?"

He scoffed. "Not as bad as it seems? Poppy read the same things I did - she's well aware of what's to come of this," he finally said.

Albus leaned forward marginally, head cocked inquisitively - and Severus got the impression that they were not longer talking *just* about his situation. *Of course, it wouldn't hurt to refuse to play along*, he thought.

"Which is?" Thick eyebrows rose at the question.

"I get sick - I stay sick. Good chance I die; even better chance the child dies."

There. All the pretty details laid out for Dumbledore's perusal.

The Headmaster made a noncommittal hum at the back of his throat - as though unconvinced that Severus could succumb to death after all they'd been through - while sipping his tea. "How are you holding up, then? I notice you've been - rather absent from the Great Hall at mealtimes."

He waved his hand nonchalantly, sipping his tea if only to focus on something other than Albus's attention on him. It had always made his chest tight, the unerring affection and concern. Something his own household had lacked - both in and away from school.

"Managing," Severus said, forcing his voice to be brighter than it should have been.

"I worry about you, Severus." A hand curled over his forearm - bone, skin, fabric away from the faded Dark Mark. "I always do."

"I know you're speaking with Poppy - she knows all about my *woes* with this situation," he said drolly, lips twisting at woes - which was rapidly becoming how he felt.

"She does tell me things - I still worry though. We've grown . . . close in the last twenty years, Severus. I will always worry." Severus snorted, eyes rolling a bit as he took another sip of tea - thankful that the cups were enchanted to keep the liquid warm.

"Do you plan on telling Remus," Dumbledore asked, eyes bright and twinkling over his glasses.

The old fool is probably already planning mine and Lupin's wedding, he thought angrily. "I should think not. Immaculate conception, as it were, fits in rather nicely with a man being pregnant," Severus said, tone sharp and dry.

"I think Remus would love the opportunity to be a father," Albus

said softly, pointedly. "He comes by here, asking after you, you know." A tilt of Dumbledore's head, all silver curls and ridiculous hat. "He worries as well."

"Lupin and his worries are of none of my concern, Headmaster." He finished the rest of his tea, ignoring that irritating twinkle in Dumbledore's eyes, and made to rise. "Now . . . if that will be all, I'd like to finish my marking."

A smile. "Of course, of course - do try to be kind to the younger years, Severus. They try so hard."

He snorted, leaving the room - a dark swirl amid bright hues.

The next time Albus called on him, two days later, Severus doggedly ignored it. He sent Posy the house elf scrambling from his rooms, ears fluttering in terror as she disappeared with a pop. He scowled at nothing in particular, his fingers nearly breaking his favorite quill. He holed himself away inside his rooms.

The next day, in between incompetent classes, he managed to get his visit with Poppy in.

"Albus wants to see you, you know." She tutted, her hands running along his skin.

"I did manage to decipher that." His guts gave a rather aggressive churn, organs cramping.

"Oh dear," Poppy said, her eyes wide - indicating she had felt the spasm. "It's only the size of a sweet pea, Severus. It shouldn't hurt you like that."

"Quite," he ground out, clutching at the sheets in a vague attempt to will the hurt to slacken.

With as clean a bill of health as he figured he would have during this pregnancy, Severus managed to sweep into his Sixth Year class with just enough billow, only a few minutes late. He could trust those students to do adequately enough, and he hunkered down at his desk.

The cramps were getting decidedly worse the longer he sat, and Severus could feel sweat dotting his brow. He dismissed class early and simply lingered in the classroom; it smelt like singed ingredients and burnt potions. Closing his eyes against an obnoxious rush of queasiness, Severus told himself he would not retch. He would *not* let a mere bundle of cells chase him from his classroom.

But he was wrong, as his saliva glands reared to life, flooding his mouth as if to make the whole sensation of retching less uncomfortable. Severus managed to stumble to a sink across the lab, clutching hard at the steel lip of the basin. His throat stung and ached as stomach acid rushed wholeheartedly from its seat in his torso, only to dribble lackluster from his lips. He coughed, his abdominal muscles clenching hard, choking breath from his lungs.

He raked his lank hair back from his face and drew in deep breaths. His legs quaked, but he made himself go to dinner anyway. After all, how many times had he dragged himself from a Death Eater meeting into the Great Hall, body all but destroyed and held together only by foreboding robes and a dour scowl.

As always, the Hall was too much - it grated on his nerves, reminding him of how exhausted he was.

Severus forced himself to choke down some soup - broth really - and some tea. His throat honestly was too raw for it, and it brought tears to his eyes every time he swallowed. But he was also rapidly approaching the point of collapse, his body running merely on fumes. At the earliest point - after dinner had been magicked away - Severus rose to his feet, bidding Minerva his adieu.

"Severus," Dumbledore called from the middle of the table. "Tea, after dessert . . . I should think?" He ignored the not-his-emotion writhing against the back of his skull.

He nodded once and fled, a flurry of long robes that managed to terrify most of the student body, Slytherins included.

Hotly, dangerously flushed, he leaned against an alcove in the hall. How many times had he caught students in there kissing, groping?

Too many. Severus rested his cheek to roughly hewn stone, trying to calm the tightness in his chest, the churning in his guts. He counted the moments until dessert would be served and then counted to five thousand after it. He knew Dumbledore wouldn't dally.

As Severus moved to leave the alcove, the queasiness got the best of him - sharp and impatient as it coiled in his innards. He turned back and retched into a corner, the force of it nearly dragging him to his knees. A hand balanced him against the stones as he was forced to retaste soup and tea and reacquaint his palate with bile and stomach acid.

When the heaving only choked the air from his lungs, clenching his muscles overly hard, he managed to mutter *scourgify* and clean up his mess. His body shook weakly, just a fine tremor, as he made his way to the Headmaster's office. He muttered the password and forced himself up the steps, rubbing his hands over his face. His exhaustion was catching up with him, leeching from the marrows of his bones. He knocked once and pushed his way into the office.

"Ah, Severus," Dumbledore exclaimed, pouring tea with a vibrant grin as Severus made his way around the wing-back chairs. "So good of you to come; how are you feeling?"

Lupin had already taken up a seat, holding a teacup. Something bright - a bit like hopefulness - itched its way along his skull. Severus gave the lycanthrope a glare as he folded himself into the open chair, the one closest the door - which he was grateful for, not that he would ever say.

"Lovely. Teatime with the resident Gryffindors - one a werewolf and the other a meddlesome coot." Severus gave Dumbledore a pointed look. "Should I conjure up a seat for Minerva as well?"

"No, no," Albus said with a laugh. "She said she had some marking to do."

She begged it off you mean, wanted no part of it, he thought - the words itching and barbing on his tongue. Especially as Lupin continued to sit there, oblivious but happy. He rolled his eyes. "If I'd

known it was so easy to avoid this chat, I would have as well. I'm sure I could have found a detention to oversee."

"Oh Severus, it's not *that* bad, surely," Lupin quipped up, finally speaking as soft hazel eyes regarded him earnestly. And Severus drew in a breath, reminding himself that the hurt in his guts did not excuse the werewolf of any cruelty he could conjure up.

"This counts as drinks," he responded drily, letting the sneer curl at his lips - blatantly ignoring the way Albus glanced curiously between the two of them.

Lupin's smile faltered a bit, but surprisingly the lighter man nodded in acceptance, as though they'd signed a pact in blood with those words. Content, Severus let himself almost relax into his chair, fingers clutching hard at his teacup as if he could crush the cramps from his guts vicariously.

The other two spoke of academics and then quidditch, neither of which Severus commented on. Instead, he merely sipped his tea.

The nausea was back, slowly spreading outward from that place just behind his navel - from that bundle of cells, shaping and forming into a child. Leaning forward, Severus placed his teacup down on the table, not wanting to tempt Fate and see if he could break the thin china with an aggressive grip. He fought the urge to rest his hand along his stomach. His fingers curled sharply against the arm of his chair.

A burst of concern rubbed its way along his thoughts, moments before Lupin opened his infuriating mouth. "Severus, are you all right?"

He wanted to snap at the other, but his jaw clenched instead. Severus slowly got to his feet, pushing himself upward with the grip on the chair's arm. "I think I shall retire for the evening. Headmaster, Lupin," he said with a nod, before leaving the room.

It took more effort than he cared to admit getting down those narrow stairs leading from Albus's office. But his thoughts were warbling dangerously, and Severus didn't really want to take a spill

down the steps. So, he focused overly hard on one foot in front of the other.

As it was, he had barely made it to the bottom step when Lupin came crashing behind him.

"Severus," the other panted out. "Are you sure you're all right?"

Waving the other off, he fought back the urge to lean against the wall. "Just a headache, Lupin. Nothing to concern yourself with." But already, a hand had curled around his bicep, effectively holding him upright - which Severus hated.

"Let me help you to your rooms?"

That damnably earnest feeling itched at the back of his skull, and Severus glowered because if *only* the werewolf would stop trying so fucking hard. He shook the other's touch off, bundling himself up in dark suspicion and effectively distancing himself from almost worshipping touches a little over a month prior.

"I am perfectly capable of getting to my rooms on my own," he sneered, casting a dismissive look in the other's direction before heading in the direction of the Dungeons, leaving Lupin behind him.

7 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a blueberry

Standing in front of the mirror – naked – was not how Severus imagined the weekend beginning.

Slowly, he ran his palms over the sides of his chest, the sharp ribs, his flat sides to his narrow hips. His gaze flitted manically, unwilling to sit on one area overly long. But his attention kept getting pulled back to his stomach, which had begun to lose its concavity – stretched over a tiny bundle of cells the size of a blueberry.

Poppy had seemed rather excited about that fact as she'd mentioned it – her hands spread on his still mostly-flat belly and smiling widely up at him. Right before she had begun to once more harass him about eating more, although Severus didn't know what good that would do *if he couldn't keep it down*.

Huffing out a sigh, Severus ran his fingers over his navel, wishing it was just a case of bloat – that something he had eaten disagreed with him. Not that he was eating much most days.

"I won't argue with you if you've the mind to stand around naked all day," the mirror nearly purred, tone suggestive. He rolled his eyes at the enchanted glass, fingers continuing their slow catalogue of old hurts. "Though, you could look a bit . . . happier to see yourself."

All long lines and sharp angles. Too pale skin. The old silver-pink stretch of scars smoothed by growth.

"Hardly anything to write home about," he drawled, tracing a scar where it curved between ribs, curling up toward his chest, thickening – the Dark Lord always had enjoyed watching them squirm.

The mirror tutted its disagreement.

“Perhaps it’s time for a new mirror – a Muggle one,” he said softly. “Less cheek, I hear.”

The mirror huffed but fell silent.

Again, his hands ran along the razor-edges of his hipbones, the skin stretched so taunt it was nearly translucent. Just under it ran a mapwork of faint blue veins, and Severus wagered he could feel the thud of his heartbeat under his fingertips as he traced them. He pushed his palm down along his ribs, feeling them jut sharply into his touch as he breathed.

Severus felt . . . almost pride at that sharpness.

A sense of brittleness wrapped up in cut-glass angles and razorblade lines. Acute fragility seemingly lingered in his frame. But his resolve was wrapped in steel, bound and determined to break and shatter and rebuild despite destruction. In a world he couldn’t control, where he had been twisted and pulled in so many directions for so long, that fragile, whetted strength had managed to keep him sane. And he had found that strength in the choice of food, the choice of clothes, the choice of brewing.

But that choice had been taken from him – *just one stupid fucking night of indulgence*. Severus squeezed his eyes tightly shut, because how could he have been so *stupid*. He should have known better.

His palms smoothed upward from his hips, roaming slowly over the slowly filling stomach – and he couldn’t help but frown. The grimace pulled naturally to his lips, his expression falling into distaste the longer he touched. But he’d chosen that, hadn’t he. Had decided to keep the child – abomination or not. Had *chosen* to suffer through the pregnancy – good, bad, and filling.

One choice for another.

And only then did he wonder if it had been the *right* choice because . . . he was admittedly a little bad when it came to making those. The wrong choice in so-called friends, in interests, and apparently

in lovers as well. Severus's long fingers splayed on his belly; his gaze drawn to that touch – *is keeping the baby the right choice* he asked himself.

"You're thinking too much again," the mirror said softly. "Perhaps, a soak?"

Severus blinked, pulling his attention from his thoughts, all maudlin and hurting. "Hmm, quite."

He roused himself long enough to approach the bath, turning the taps harshly. Water flooded into the basin, swirling around the drain and filling rapidly. Steam curled lazily upward. Gingerly, Severus stepped into the bath, his legs folding gracefully as he sank into the swelling water.

For once, that ever-constant sick feeling churning restlessly in his stomach had relaxed. He let his head loll back against the porcelain rim, drawing in deep and cleansing breaths of steamy air. His gaze tracked patterns in the roughly hewn stone of his ceiling, letting his attention drift. There was pressure against his ribs, resting heavy on his spine and hips – but it was manageable. After all, discomfort could be overlooked, ignored given enough incentive. And that churning, roiling nausea in his guts was allowing itself to be stayed as he drew in deep, slow breaths.

Bath steam pushed stickily moist fingers into his lungs as he breathed, the nearly scalding water creeping up along his frame. It lapped along his hips, pulling slowly upward toward his chest. And Severus let the liquid take his weight, leaving him feeling weightless. He drew fingertips along the rippling surface of the bath before waving absentmindedly at the taps to shut them off.

And Severus let his eyes drift shut.

8 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a raspberry

“That didn’t count as drinks, you know.” Lupin finally spoke, breathing out into the silence between them of the suddenly very empty teacher’s lounge. Flitwit had – at some point – retired to his quarters, leaving the two of them alone.

When Lupin had entered – disturbing the quiet of the place – Severus had given it some real thought to leaving. The bright flash of Lupin’s emotion – something like pleasant surprise – had nearly driven him out. But the baby – now the size of a raspberry, Poppy had told him that morning – seemed content enough, and he was loathed to move.

Instead, he continued to flip albeit a bit aimlessly through a potions periodical, occasionally making notes in the margin.

“Hmm,” he said, refusing to look up. He could feel Lupin’s gaze on him. “You seemed amenable to the idea at the time.” Severus took a sip of his tea.

“Drinks, Severus. You had one cup of tea . . . which you didn’t even finish!”

“My stomach was disagreeing with me,” he said, the little slip of the tongue pulling them closer to the truth than he liked.

Concern swamped him, and Severus closed his eyes, hand to his temple as though he could shut it out.

“Have you seen Poppy about it? Is that why you’ve been missing all the meals?” A warm hand brushed his arm, and Severus recoiled.

He fixed a dark glare on the lighter man. “I am *not* a child. Do not presume to coddle me, Lupin,” he hissed. Severus got to his feet, glowering down at the lycanthrope. He ignored the queasy feeling

in his stomach.

“I’m not coddling you. It’s called concern, Severus,” Lupin said softly. “I don’t like knowing that one of my friends is ill.”

“I am *not* your friend, Lupin. Don’t delude yourself to think so,” Severus snapped out.

The look on Lupin’s face bordered on desolate – as though he’d received a Dementor’s Kiss.

Severus stalked from the lounge, bristling sharply. He let the doors to his rooms slam behind him, tearing at his thick teaching robes.

“Stupid fucking werewolf,” he snarled, struggling out of his clothes and heading for the bathroom. A blisteringly hot shower seemed to fit his mood. “Damn moron, dense as ever; we’re not fucking *friends*. One fucking night does *not* make us friends.”

“You know I love it when you cuss,” the mirror purred. “And when you’re fit to be tied.”

He threw his shirt at the offending item, effectively obscuring most of it as he undid his trousers. The mirror still managed to whistle wolfishly at him – which earned it a rather rude hand gesture as Severus cranked the knobs on the shower, watching the spray spring to life. He tucked himself into the water – hot, cooking him to the bones – and stood. The nausea was beaten back, relaxing to a dull heavy coil of ache around his lower back. His skin flushed a vibrant shade of crimson, all his blood vessels opening. It left him feeling lightheaded.

Severus spread his fingers on the slick wall, letting his body sway. He was acutely aware of his heart pounding heavy in his throat, that soft place just behind his jaw hinge. He was acutely aware of it slowing, bone-achingly heavy – thudding against the cage of his ribs, as though it wanted out, *out*, ***OUT***.

Severus turned his head slightly enough for the hot water to splatter across his cheeks, the bridge of his nose.

He was so tired, allowing his body to be swayed by the thrum of the

shower, the pound of his pulse. He almost missed it, as his brain shut down, his body collapsing effortlessly.

Water'll run cold, was the last conscious thought Severus had.

And the water did run cold, the exact opposite of the all-over scalding burn – it was the first thing he realized, when his brain finally stuttered to life. With a groan, Severus pushed himself into a seated position, his arms struggling desperately hard to bear his weight. He could taste blood in his mouth. Shivers had taken up in the hollows of his bones, hooking claws in deep.

Finally, he managed to struggle to his feet, shutting off the frigid water and stumbling to bed. He drew the covers tightly around his soaked and freezing frame. He forced his eyes to shut, his jaw tense to keep his teeth from chattering.

Severus let himself drift away.

There was banging at the door – inside his head, in the hollow of his throat, curled around his spine. He squinted his eyes shut, willing whoever was on the other side of the doors away. And suddenly, it stopped. *Thank Circe*, he thought – if only to fill the suddenly too-quiet void of his mind.

But then there was overly loud commotion in his office, promptly transferring to his rooms. "For fuck's sake," he ground out, pulling the covers over his head.

"Severus," came Minerva's shrill voice, suddenly too much – shattering the quiet of his mind, of the room.

He squinted his eyes shut, willing her to just leave . . . only for her to yank the covers from around his face. "What on Earth are you doing? You've been missing for two bloody days," she hissed, her fingers hooking on his shoulder and tugging him over. "I thought we were past that!"

"Two days," he finally managed as she sat on the edge of the bed, her eyes darkly worried as she looked him over. She softened some, once she seemed convinced that he was fine.

“Quite. You’re rather lucky I convinced Albus to give you some space – he was about ready to set the werewolf on you.” Her tone was soft, playful. “And well . . . we both know what happened the last time *he* was given entrance to these rooms.”

Severus felt his face heat, even as he scowled darkly at the older woman.

“Think I’m coming down with something,” he said, tone as dry as possible. And having been under cold water for so long, it was a likely possibility. Though, to be honest, he was simply lucky he hadn’t drowned.

“It’s called pregnancy,” she quipped even as she reached for him. Minerva’s hand touched his throat, his cheek, his forehead matronly. Her mouth twisted into a sharper expression. “I’ll have your classes suspended for the rest of the week. Expect Poppy down shortly.”

He watched her go before drawing the covers up over his head. The whole thing, which had been a mess to begin with, was rapidly unraveling, pulling apart at the seams.

The next time he opened his eyes, Poppy was bustling around his room. She was twittering around, gathering things, and he watched her tiredly.

“I am capable of taking care of myself,” he finally said, his voice housing a put-upon tone.

“Oh, I know that, Severus – but we all worry so very much.” She brought him tea, some Invigorating Draught – which they both knew wouldn’t help. “And poor Remus, that dear . . . he’s been going out of his mind, love.”

“The full moon is next week; I’m sure he’s just being moody.”

“Oh no, no, no. He has been rather concerned about you. Said you were surlier than ever, not eating, tired. He’s concerned about *you.*”

He gave her a look, lips pursed in a tight line. Severus made a noise at the back of his throat, reaching for the tea Poppy had made.

“I think . . . perhaps if you told him,” she said softly, giving him a look. The look that hinted that Severus really *should* tell Lupin.

“Perhaps I’d rather fuck off and die,” he said with a smile that bordered on a grimace – all sharp and bitter and hurt.

“It might happen. The baby might do it to you,” Poppy suddenly said, her voice a grave whisper. “And I don’t . . . when it’s time for you to give birth, I have no idea what to expect, my dear.” She gave a sigh, sitting on the edge of the bed; the lines of her face sharpened with uncertainty, with hurt.

“You merely . . . cut it out, Poppy. And what will be will be,” he told her with a shrug, pushing down the small bubble of anxiety that grew in his chest. Severus flopped back down in the bed clothes and stared at the ceiling until she had gone.

9 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a cherry.

"I was worried, you know," Poppy told either him or the baby – he wasn't entirely certain which – as she cast a spell to see the health of his baby. A jagged line indicating heartbeat bounded across the air above the bed.

"Yes, well," he started, falling silent at the tingle of magic sparking across his skin. His own heartbeat bounded after the baby's, disappearing.

"I think I'll always worry . . . if the baby dies and we miss it, Severus – you'll likely die as well. You know that, don't you." A simple statement as her hands moved along his belly.

"I am quite aware of the possibility, Poppy." And it was true. He was painfully aware of the possibility, the very real *probability*, of him dying. It cleaved itself into his thoughts with every retched meal, every deep-seated cramp, every restless night.

"And at the end of it . . ." she started, her sentence falling short between them.

"The Muggle way would be best I think – not sure my body could take too much magic," he finally said, hating himself for admitting that weakness. But a churn of that deep-seated sick feeling proved his assumption correct.

"I'll look into it – we've time. It's only the size of a cherry," she said, patting his stomach tenderly. "We've time."

Severus dressed slowly, his fingers cramped from gripping the sheets. "When you go to dinner, please tell Lupin to be in my office tomorrow evening at seven – no dalliances."

"He'd probably prefer to hear it from you," she told him, her tone

bright with laughter.

"Precisely why it'll come from you," Severus drawled, taking his leave of the Infirmary. After all, it would do him no good to encourage the mongrel more than he already had.

In his rooms, forgoing dinner, Severus exchanged his teaching robes for a nightshirt and climbed into bed. He twisted in the sheets trying to get comfortable. But the baby was having none of it, writhing in his guts sharply – the nausea swamping him.

"Really," he ground out at a particularly hard cramp. "Must you squirm so damn much." His hand touched his stomach roughly, as though he could reach into his torso and still the sickness there. Giving a rub, Severus drew in what he hoped was a calming breath. The nausea seemed to abate – to what he presumed was a reasonable ache. After weeks of his body being wracked with the bone-deep hurt of cramps, the constant onslaught of retching – he finally felt a little bit of ease.

Tugging his nightshirt up around his sternum – biting down the shame he felt at leaving his lower half dreadfully naked – Severus rubbed his stomach. The skin there was tight, beginning to swell a little. He rubbed fingertips following the sharp coastline of his ribs, the taunt stretch of skin between his hipbones.

Sighing, Severus resolved himself to another sleepless night – hopefully one without too many trips to the loo between then and sunrise.

And in the morning – after he had finally managed to doze off, only to be brought back to consciousness with a sharp reminder of sickness clenching in his innards – he felt more rested than he had since the whole thing had begun. Even as Severus retched harshly in the bathroom, his stomach clenching heavily. After a quick shower, he nearly hummed to himself as he put on the kettle – forgoing any pretense that he would attend any meals in the Great Hall.

The day would be spent teaching children who didn't want to learn before becoming absorbed in making the Wolfsbane. Somehow, the

Dungeons managed to go unscathed by the end of the day – even with Second Year Gryffindors and Slytherins only paying half a mind to their potions. Forgoing his marking for the time being, Severus charmed his robes open and left them in his office, setting to the methodical work that was brewing.

He watched the potion avidly, taking care that it was well above his usual standards of perfection – *not for Lupin*, he told himself firmly, *but for the baby*.

Severus had managed to not leave the laboratory for the bathroom once. Every sizeable swell of nausea had been slacked with a firm touch, a sip of cooling chamomile and honey. He tried not to think of the sight he must have been, rubbing his belly continuously as he stirred the potion.

At precisely seven, there was a knock at the door – and Severus made the overly conscious effort to take his hand from his stomach as he bade Lupin entrance.

"Feeling all right tonight, Severus," Lupin asked, gaze drawing along his form near tangibly as he ladled the quicksilver potion into the chalice. "You look – more relaxed than I've seen you in weeks."

There was that heady thrum of emotion at the back of his skull again – something like appreciation. Severus blanched when he turned and realized the lycanthrope was giving him the once-over – several times. He scowled, thrusting the goblet at the lighter man, who at least had the decency to flush at having been caught staring.

"The teaching robes are too stifling for the amount of effort your potion requires, Lupin. That's all – I can assure you." He set about unrolling his shirtsleeves as Lupin drank, complaining – as always – of the taste.

"It's not an aphrodisiac," Severus snapped out, giving Lupin a pointed look.

"You could . . . combine them, then." That look was most certainly a leer.

"Tomorrow – seven o'clock sharp," he reminded Lupin, in a deadpan tone – effectively showing the other to the door.

And while Severus hated spending his weekends brewing the Wolfsbane, it was preferable to teaching insolent children and marking up half-witted essays.

But on Saturday, it became dreadfully apparent that Lupin was loathed to leave his classroom, shuffling his feet while his fingers clenched at the goblet stem. The nervousness humming at the back of his thoughts was managing to stir up the nausea from where it had finally stilled to a manageable quiver in his stomach. Rolling his eyes, Severus headed into the office and folded himself behind his desk, dipping his quill in crimson and pulling a pile of Fifth Year essays to him. "Why're you still here, Lupin," he bit out as the werewolf darkened his doorway, his attention already drifting to the lazy almost-cursive of a Ravenclaw youth – she dotted her i's with tiny hearts he noticed, mouth turning down in muted disgust.

"I thought . . . maybe dinner?" An upward lilt of hopefulness.

"You've already eaten – and if not, I'm sure the house elves would be more than accommodating of an original golden child of Gryffindor such as yourself." Severus cursed himself for the lack of venom in those words, which wound up leaving them as condescending – which was good enough.

"You always miss during this time – what about dessert and tea, then?" The hopefulness was rapidly approaching desperation. It itched its way across the crevices of his mind.

"Go away, Lupin," he bit out, suddenly tired, even as he forced the nib to bleed all over the unsuspecting parchment in front of him.

And while it was dreadfully apparent that Lupin didn't want to leave – he did. And Severus, with a sigh retired to his rooms. He transfigured his nightshirt into worn-soft sleep pants and collapsed on the bed, his hands automatically rubbing tersely along his stomach.

"Your father is an insufferable git, you know," he told the fetus,

thinking *how strange to think of Lupin in such a way.*

On Sunday, the nausea would not abate, and Severus sent a house elf to retrieve Lupin earlier than normal. His arms quivered pitifully, and he had already violently hurled into the sink twice – as though the baby was getting back at him for thinking the tumultuous sickness could be so easily swayed. His throat was too sore for him to even attempt tea.

Severus had already tucked himself away in his office, folded in behind his desk; the potion had been left on his classroom desk with the simple instruction *drink it all* on a scrap of paper under the cup. His fingers pressed harshly against his eyes, his cheeks. There was a headache mounting behind his temples, incessant and loud . . . unwilling to be ignored.

There was the soft rustle of fabric – the only indicator, really – as Lupin entered the office. Feelings of contentment itched him all over.

"Lupin, what are you doing," he asked, tone all sharp glass and silk. Severus couldn't be bothered to move his fingers – certain that the steady pressure against his eyes was keeping the headache from transforming into a migraine.

A soft hum. "Marking." More rustling.

He could only imagine that the damnable lycanthrope was making himself at home. Severus scowled, finally tearing his fingers from his eyes and giving Lupin the most hateful glare he could muster up given the pounding in his head. Lupin – that cheeky bastard – had the audacity to look comfortable, folded up in one of the rarely used leather chairs in his office, an inkwell charmed to hover at his side while he spread an essay across his lap.

"I can see that. You have a perfectly acceptable office *upstairs*," he ground out.

"No one will bother me down here though – and besides I enjoy the company."

Severus drew in a deep breath through his nose, more than prepared to snap out a nasty remark – but he found himself too exhausted; so, it came out as a derisive snort. Pressing a hand to his temple, he conceded — pulling his own essay over to his line of vision. He forced the words to make sense, and if he graded a bit laxer, he would never admit it.

"Severus . . ." Lupin finally said, after moments had pulled past. He could hear a million unspoken questions, requests, comments in that tone – all assumptions, but nonetheless true.

"No," he said sharply, turning his attention to his grading.

And surprisingly, Lupin let it go.

He made a mental note to be locked away in his rooms at seven the next two days when Lupin came for the final doses of his potion – a forced evening of grading, sharing space with the lycanthrope was not how he had envisioned the night progressing.

10 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a strawberry.

"Size of a strawberry," he repeated, watching Poppy's fingers push on his stomach, inspecting the very beginning of the swell as the lingering twinge of magic tickled his skin – the inquisitive spell having shown everything to be right in his world, or rather as right as it could be.

"Yes." A beat of silence. "Do you want to know what it is? I've found a spell for it, I think."

"No. I'd rather not."

"You're not even the least but curious," she goaded.

"No."

"Severus," Poppy griped, nearly pouting as he got up off the table and began to dress.

"I'd rather not get too attached, Poppy," *in case this whole thing goes tits up* remained unspoken.

"I'll see you next week," she finally said, a decidedly melancholy edge to her tone as he left the Infirmary.

The walk to the Dungeons was full of thoughts, because of course, there was a desire to know the gender of the baby – and it was hard for him to already not be irrevocably attached. All of which, Severus hated as he ran through the motions of starting class – setting the seemingly unteachable brats up for properly trying their hands at the Wiggenweld Potion. He scowled at nothing in particular as they went about it – thoroughly terrifying a Hufflepuff Second Year coincidently. The deep sigh rattled free from the bones of his chest as a cauldron at the back of the classroom let out a puff of lilac smoke which should have been more of a violet color. It

only added to his rather nasty mood.

"If none of you are willing to listen to instructions," he hissed, voice low and dangerous as he eyed the students – all of whom were promptly frozen in their seats with fear – "then I don't have the patience to teach you today. Ten points from Hufflepuff *each*," he ground out.

A few of the Ravenclaws snickered, and Severus turned thunderously on them. "Twenty from Ravenclaw *each*." A headache was stirring between his temples. "Get out of my Dungeons!"

The classroom emptied in record time – leaving him alone with smoldering potions and wasted ingredients.

A cramp gripped at his insides, and Severus gritted his teeth against the onslaught. His fingers shook as he lifted his now cold tea to his lips – the chamomile very nearly unpalatable. Another sharp twist in his guts left him choked for breath, his hand automatically pressing against the tightness of his belly.

"Brat," he gasped out.

"That's not nice, Severus – I'm sure they were trying," Lupin chuckled from the doorway.

He certainly didn't have the patience for the werewolf. "What do you want Lupin," he spat out, managing to conjure up an acceptable amount of hostility despite the pounding in his head and the twisting in his stomach.

"The House Points for Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw just dropped dramatically." The lighter man looked pointedly around the classroom. "I figured they had utterly destroyed your classroom or singed your favorite robes perhaps."

Playful emotion buzzed at the back of his thoughts, and Severus scowled even further at Lupin. "Think yourself funny, do you." The wolfish grin on the other's lips gave him all the answer he needed. "Piss off," he ground out, getting to his feet and disappearing into his rooms behind a slammed door.

Severus found himself in the bathroom once more, cold and bitter tea flooding his mouth for the second time that hour – going rather than coming. There was a sharp, brittle pop near his throat – suddenly his chest felt very tight, the ability to breath without pain all but gone, making him scowl further. It did nothing to impede the twisting of his innards, the violent upheaval that managed to dispel every crumb he had been fortunate enough to consume. The old injury – a broken collarbone – had been stirred to life from the constant retching, Severus could only discern, the healed fracture points weakened. He pulled at his robes, inspecting the deep cut of his clavicle. Lightly gasping through barely parted lips, he tried to ignore the ache in his chest. Severus scrabbled in the counters for a bone regrowth potion.

The liquid was cool and viscous as he gulped around it. And instead of near instantaneous relief, there lingered that bone-aching hurt. Grimacing, he righted his robes and made his way up to the Great Hall for dinner.

He had forgotten just how uncomfortable a broken collarbone was – months being out from under the Dark Lord's reign had lulled him into complacency, and the sharp pain was a rather nasty reminder of just how fragile the human body could be. Every motion – the lift of a hand, the flex of throat muscles, turning his head – all aggravated the injury, even as he tried to use his left hand as little as possible. He waved off Minerva's cocked eyebrow, downright ignored a look of concern from Lupin, and made to excuse himself to Albus – who gave him a look.

"Am I to assume that you will not be joining the staff meeting this evening?" There was a flintiness in Dumbledore's tone, making Severus very aware of the Headmaster's displeasure.

He had completely forgotten.

"Yes. I have more pressing matter to attend to," Severus finally managed to say, tilting his jaw upward just slightly like a defiant child. Almost daring Albus to scoff, to ask what could be more pressing than a pointless meeting where they all sat around and complained meaninglessly.

Thankfully, Albus just sniffed in disdain. "I'll allow it this time. But next time, Severus . . . I expect you to be there." The older man gave him a very pointed look, making it quite clear that Severus had better be at the next one.

"Of course, Headmaster," he deferred quietly, taking the small victory as it was given to him.

Fleeing the Hall, Severus tried to keep himself together, tried not to stumble his way to his rooms.

In his rooms, Severus stripped down in the bathroom and examined his chest more thoroughly, fingers touching at the puffy stretch of skin near his neck – ignoring the whistle of appreciation that the mirror gave him. No bump meant the break wasn't as bad as last time, and no discoloration meant no damaged blood vessels.

"Would this be dessert then," the mirror purred, and he was fairly certain if it had the ability to create expressions its current expression would have been a leer. "A treat?"

He scoffed as Severus rattled through his cabinets, looking for a leftover bandage from during the War. "Hardly," he gritted out as he shuffled through various potions he had apparently collected after twenty hard years of penance – fairly certain he had tucked some bandages away. After all, Hagrid had made enough of the damned things, unicorn hair being exceedingly valuable for healing, that he *should* have still had some laying around. Finally finding one, he faced himself in the mirror.

"Well, I think you're quite the sight for sore eyes," the enchanted glass quipped as he leaned in closer, gingerly smoothing his fingertips along his collarbone.

"I need to concentrate, so keep quiet you," he scathingly told the mirror, who for once seemed to listen as it fell silent.

Running his fingers roughly down the length of the bone, Severus gritted his teeth as bone ends ground together before finding their place. He stretched the bandage tightly over his collarbone, where the last break had been – where his fingers had found the busted

seam of clavicle – and magicked it into place with a sticky charm. Thankfully, the bandage was close enough to his skin color – a milky white – that he decided Poppy wouldn't even notice. But he could always make up a lie on the spot, something he'd gotten rather good at in the last twenty years, if she asked.

Keeping his left arm carefully still, Severus drew a bath and climbed into the deep maw of the tub. The water swirled icily around his ankles and calves, fully enveloping him as Severus folded his body into the tub. And while it choked the very air from his lungs – it froze the hurt in his chest to a manageable thrum. Letting his head loll against the rim of the tub, he willed himself to relax. He let the cold, cold water freeze every part of him until he could doze.

And in the morning, he found himself in water that had managed to warm just barely – having taken all of his body temperature with it. His joints were frozen into place as he forced himself to stand. The only plus appeared to be the swelling in his chest had gone down.

There was too much thought involved with Severus stepping out of the tub, mindfully reminding his fingers to *fucking bend* as he dressed.

Feeling lethargic – similar to an animal waking from hibernation – he headed for the Infirmary, convinced some warm tea and easy conversation would do his mind, body, and soul good. And of course, Poppy acquiesced happily, chattering away brightly as she fixed the tea. He was trying to listen as she droned on about some mass prank the Gryffindors had managed to pull on the Slytherins – and consequently the other two Houses as well, resulting in an alarming amount of body hair.

But it was difficult.

There was really only one thing on his mind.

"Poppy," Severus finally said, staring down at his tea. "If you simply must know the gender of the baby, I'll allow it. But I don't want to know." The words came out in a rush, and Poppy beamed at him, and Severus beat down a flush of hurt. It was a precaution, really. He wanted *someone* to know, after all. He wanted *desperately* for

someone to know – should anything go horribly wrong – the life he would have brought into the world. The life he would have cared for, fiercely and deeply, if he or the baby or both were to die.

The thought of the mere possibility of his child dying merely as a genderless baby – rather than his son or daughter – churned his stomach more aggressively than the fetus ever could.

"Really? Are you sure? I wouldn't want to impose." Though the look on her face was the exact opposite of the sentiment. The glimmer in her eyes said she wanted to impose very, very much so.

"Someone should know," Severus told her as he squinted his eyes shut tightly, unwilling to have any part of the spell. There was the tingle of magic against his skin, warming him briefly from the outside in before it faded away. Severus counted to fifty before he opened his eyes, giving any lingering pixie dust the chance to clear.

Poppy's mouth was split in a wide grin, so wide he was sure it hurt. "Are you sure you don't want to know, love," she cooed, cheeks flushing with happiness.

"No," he said drily, sipping at his tea and ignoring the positively vibrating with excitement mediwitch beside him.

"I absolutely cannot wait, Severus. I'm so excited for your little love."

Scowling at nothing in particular, Severus rolled his eyes and determinedly took a sip of his tea. He pinned her with a look, even as she giggled around her teacup. Severus heaved a heavy sigh, feeling very put-upon.

"Do try to contain yourself, Poppy."

11 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a lime.

"Really, Minerva," Severus growled lowly. His fingers clenched around the handle of his teaspoon, desperately focusing to keep the blush under control.

"Oh, come now. It's nothing to be ashamed of."

"I do *not* require an escort."

She tutted. "Albus thinks otherwise."

"Albus likes to *meddle*," he growled out, glaring down at the cooling cup of tea in front of him.

"Well if you could be bothered to come to the staff meetings more regularly, perhaps Albus wouldn't be as concerned about your health," she griped at him, hinting at Poppy often complaining about his slow downward spiral toward nothingness.

Although, Severus doubted Albus had come up with the idea on his own. Decidedly, Minerva was just as invested as Poppy, shooting him sly looks. He was sure the mediwitch had told the older professor all about the *dear love* growing in his guts. Just as sure as he was that Minerva then whispered in Albus's ear, wheedling him – reminding Dumbledore about the Herculean feats that Severus had accomplished for the good of the world and how much of a *shame* it would be if Severus were to die.

But still, he glowered at the Headmaster, who verily twinkled back at him – compassion and caring and mischief oozing from his eyes, from his smile.

"Severus, really – there's no point in fighting it. You know he'll have his way eventually."

Gritting his teeth, Severus gave a curt nod. "Shall we," he said drily, disdain seething in each word.

"Yes, let's."

Something sharp burned at the back of his skull – his skin prickled, all too aware of Lupin watching them leave the Great Hall together, seemingly desperate to follow but too polite to leave Hagrid to his own conversation.

"Minerva," Poppy exclaimed in surprise, clasping her hands together in front of her. "What a pleasant addition to Severus's visit!"

Severus snorted derisively as he went about undressing to the waist, carefully keeping his back to the two women – who spoke fervently to one another as though it had been years since their last meeting, rather than just earlier that day when they had surely shared a kiss before departure for the day. Finally, he laid down on the bed – eyes immediately drawn to the slight, but definitive, swell of his stomach. The pressure against his collarbone made him grit his teeth, so he was almost grateful when the women finally took stock of his situation.

"Aww," both women exclaimed at once, flocking to the bed – flanking him. He resisted the near undeniable urge to curl into a ball. Severus flinched as soft hands came at him from both sides, cupping the barely perceivable swell of his stomach.

A hand smoothed over his skin, following the slight bump – Poppy's he knew. "Lime, dear." Her expression soft and open in its wonderment as she looked up at him. "Your baby is the size of a lime."

"This is remarkable," Minerva breathed out, her touch gentle against his skin.

He snorted. "I'm hardly the first pregnancy you've seen," Severus scowled, batting at their hands – fed up with being pawed at.

"You're positively glowing," the elder professor told him, smiling cheekily. "So lovely, Severus." Her hands were back, petting softly

at his belly, even as he glowered at her. Her hand slipped lovingly through his hair in an affectionate gesture as she sighed dreamily.

Severus gritted his teeth, scowling angrily. "If you're set on children, I'm sure Poppy would acquiesce," he bit out, earning him a choked out laugh from the pair.

"Don't give her ideas," Poppy muttered almost darkly, as her fingers resumed the trek of his body.

He suffered through Poppy's prodding, thorough almost rough fingers against his suddenly tender underbelly. The tingle of magic against his skin as she ran an assessment of him. "Have you felt the baby move, yet?"

He was grateful that all her inspections were focused around the swell of his stomach. He clenched his jaw tightly, trying not to pay too much attention to either the ache up near his throat or the cramping in his guts.

"No. Should I," Severus finally asked, beating back the urge to cup the bump possessively and feel any sign of life there stirring.

"Not yet – not for first time mothers." She pointedly ignored his glare and continued. "But you've always been rather perceptive, so thought I would ask. Besides," she said, fingers pressing along the soft spot below his ribs, checking for anything out of the ordinary amongst his organs, "this isn't really a normal pregnancy."

Poppy's hands left his torso, which he took as his indication to sit up. Severus hurried to dress, especially as Minerva continued to stare dreamily at him – or at his stomach rather – like all she wanted to do for the rest of the evening was pet and coo at the bump.

"Do we know what we're having," Minerva finally mentioned, voice a bit too excited for his liking. Taking on *his* pregnancy as though it was a shared task between the three of them, which perhaps it was.

"Poppy knows." He shrugged on his shirt, trying not to dwell on the fact that the fabric had less slack in it than it had even a week ago

as he buttoned it.

"Severus doesn't want to know," the mediwitch remarked, lips pursed.

The glossy look in the older woman's eyes made him sigh as he finished doing up the buttons on his oxford, wordlessly charming the buttons on his robes to crawl closed. "Fine. Poppy, you can tell Minerva what I'm having – after I leave, and contingent on no one saying a *thing* to me about gender." He gave the women a stern look. "I *don't* want to know. I mean it. No hints or references."

The two women giggled, sharing an excited look and positively quivering at the aspect of a shared secret. Sighing in a very exasperated way, Severus rolled his eyes and promptly left the Infirmary.

Severus headed to the Dungeons, wanting nothing more than to crawl into bed and rub at his stomach until the cramps relaxed. He scowled deeply when he noticed Lupin loitering outside his rooms – looking for all the world out of place but patient.

"Ah, Severus," the werewolf called, visibly brightening when he noticed Severus.

"Lupin," he scowled, stopping and drawing himself up, arms crossed as he glowered down his nose at the other.

"A few of us are going to Hogsmeade tomorrow for drinks, some time away from the children and all that. I was wondering if you'd like to go?" Hopefulness was bright and incessant at the back of his thoughts, stirring a migraine to life. And he fought down the urge to pinch the bridge of his nose. Rather, he sneered at the werewolf, offering up the nastiest expression he could conjure.

"Lupin, I have *no* idea why you're continuing to labor under the notion that we are friends – we never have been, nor will we ever be. The sooner you get that through your thick, intolerable skull the better."

Severus pushed past the lighter man, charming his doors open

wordlessly to keep from muttering his password, if only so Lupin wouldn't hear. Fingers touched the hem of his robe sleeve before he could quite get the door closed, which only served to make him scowl even further.

"It might be fun," Lupin finally said, desperation lacing his tone.

"Stop bothering me, Lupin," he bit out, tugging his sleeve free and giving the insolent Gryffindor a glare.

"Sir," the hallway offered up, the youth's voice quiet but effectively shattering the silence between himself and Lupin. And Severus turned to blink slowly at his prefect, where Ainsley stood – clutching his textbook and glancing between the two of them, eyes anxiously wide.

"Mister Ainsley," Severus drawled, wanting nothing more than to disappear into his open doorway and ignore both of them.

"Are you having office hours tonight, Sir? I've a question on the Erumpent Potion . . ." and the boy trailed off pitifully.

Touching his forehead briefly, Severus closed the door to his rooms and fixed Ainsley with a sharp look, because as it was the Erumpent Potion was rather straightforward – but he would allow the prefect the farce. "We'll reconvene to my office, shall we," he asked, gesturing vaguely down the hall. The youth nodded and turned sharply on his heel, heading in the direction of Severus's office. And Severus begrudgingly made to follow him.

Lupin's hand curled around his bicep, some sort of nearly desperate emotion. "Severus," the werewolf continued, tone pitched low. "Will you at least think about it. Time away from the students seems right up your alley."

Sniffing derisively, Severus pulled his arm free of Lupin's grip. "I did think about it, Lupin. And I've decided that a weeknight with you and Hagrid and whomever else plans on getting pissed is exactly how I *don't* want to spend the evening." He fixed the other with a haughty look, lips pursing sourly. "Now if you'll excuse me."

Severus found the prefect standing patiently outside his office door, still clutching *Magical Drafts and Potions* as though his life depended on it. With a wave of his hand, the door fell open, and Severus motioned Ainsley inside. The candles roared to life as they stepped over the threshold.

"What precisely is troubling you on the potion, Mister Ainsley." Severus rested his hip against the edge of his desktop, blinking away the rising discomfort in his innards in favor of the dark-headed boy in front of him. His head cocked just slightly in curiosity, wondering what excuse the boy would come up with.

"Well, Sir . . . do you add the horn first, or the tail?" The heavy text thumped down on a worktable, and the boy began to frantically flip through the water-battered pages. "And it says here *chopped Erumpent tail*, but it doesn't say how finely."

He nearly smiled, seeing through the lies of the child, and quoted the text softly. "Chop the Erumpent tail no larger than a centimeter and a half, sprinkled in, stirred counterclockwise eight times." The color faded from Ainsley's cheeks. "However, as I'm sure you've read . . . you add the ground horn in first, don't you, Mister Ainsley."

Ainsley blinked at him almost stupidly before shutting the book with an audible thunk. His head dipped downward as if in embarrassment. "Yes, Sir. You do. And the tail is followed by the Exploding Fluid, after you've stirred for three minutes exactly."

"I suggest the next time you lie, Mister Ainsley, you at least have the decency to be good at it," Severus drawled, tone low and dangerous. The prefect straightened his spine, shoulders squaring as he gave Severus a nearly pleading look. "Lucky for you, Professor Lupin is hopeless at Potions."

"I was only trying to save you from Professor Lupin, Sir."

That statement shocked a huff of amusement from him, as near to a laugh as he had ever uttered in the presence of a student, and Severus gave the prefect a sharp look. His arms crossed leisurely over his chest, as though he could keep the rest of the laugh in with the motion. "How very *cunning* of you, Thomas. But completely

unnecessary, I assure you."

The boy flinched at the use of his given name, as though he expected a reprimand. And when none was forthcoming, he continued boldly. "He seemed . . . to be bothering you." A pause before the prefect remembered himself. "Sir."

Dark words pooled in his mouth, but Severus swallowed them down. Instead, he sneered at Ainsley. "Trust me, Professor Lupin has nothing but cheek. He's harmless." A subtle glance in the prefect's direction revealed a skeptical look crossing the boy's features as his lips pursed. Sighing, Severus made his way around the desk and absentmindedly shuffled essays before giving the youth a more pointed look. "Is there anything else."

There was a dismissal in his tone; an eyebrow cocked in almost agitation as Severus gathered the leaves of parchment for an evening of marking.

Ainsley hefted his book up and stood there uncertainly for a moment. "No, Sir. I don't believe so . . ."

Severus gestured toward the door. "I trust you'll find your way to the Common Room. And do close the door behind you." Already his attention was on the Shrinking Solutions essays his Third Years had turned in earlier that day. He waited until he heard the soft click of the office door shutting before Severus breathed out a sigh of relief, grateful Bump had behaved, and headed through the inner door and into his chambers for what he hoped was a productive evening marking.

12 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a plum

ffs - this might be the shortest chapter ever posted. apologies!

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Severus stretched, which was hard to do while keeping his left arm straight – and less satisfactory than if he had been able to stretch fully across the bed. The motion seemed to stir Bump to life, a cramp tearing at his insides sharply.

Gritting his teeth, Severus pressed against his belly. "You're the size of a bloody *plum*," he bit out, voice tight. He glowered down at the soft swell of his abdomen, framed by sharp hipbones and rib bones. "Being so small, you ought to be more pleasant to me," he grumbled, giving the bump a harsh rub.

The cramp became an almost bearable ache.

"Maybe toast today," he said, pushing himself into a seated position, scowling as he went. He hated how his mouth ached and salivated at the mere mention of solid food – it was simply toast.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Severus looked down at the small – but somehow intrusive – bump of his stomach. His body had always bordered on lankiness, so the swell of his stomach was taking more time to get used to than he would have liked. The body change caused shameful feelings to stir restlessly in his chest. He had always tried hard to be as noninvasive, as invisible as possible. With the growing girth around his middle, that sentiment felt impossible.

Severus cupped his belly, running his palms up over the swell. "You're going to be a bother, aren't you. Just like all the other brats in this castle." Another cramp settled in his abdomen, twisting his guts painfully. "*My* brat," he clarified, fingers spreading on his stomach.

Getting to his feet, Severus moved to take a step – stilling as dizziness swamped him, nearly blotting out his vision. His fingers grabbed at the messy bedclothes, even as the vertigo drove him to the floor. His vision swayed, doubled, righted, greyed. His fingers knotted painfully in the sheets, waiting for it to pass.

"Ah," he managed, letting out a puff of breath, swaying where he sat on the floor. "No toast then," Severus finally whispered, pulling himself to his feet as the dizziness finally abated. "Just tea, perhaps," he told Bump.

Heading into the kitchenette, he tried to ignore the equal parts of hunger and nausea snapping at his all too empty stomach. Putting the kettle on, Severus leaned against the counter, barely managing to hold himself up. He mulled over the days of wasted meals and wondered if it would be easier to just forgo. Which then, of course, begged the question of just how *many* meals he could miss before his body gave up.

Severus scowled, watching the kettle as it began to steam and whistle. He poured himself a cup and blew on the scalding liquid. The tea would make him feel full, would trick his body into feeling fed – would offer up a gentler option when he promptly hurled his guts out sometime in the next few hours. Tea would make his throat infinitely less raw than real food.

Sighing, Severus took a tentative sip – suddenly feeling much more exhausted than he had in the previous weeks, his hand sliding down to palm his belly.

"You better be worth this," he grumbled.

13 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a lemon

So - from here on out, we affectionately refer to Sev's growing baby as Bump. Aw <3
Almost makes up for the ton of sexual tension between him and a certain Gryffindor.

****

Half remembered dreams buzzed at the back of his head. Of a broad, heated weight against his back and uneven breath panting against his skin, in his ear; heavy thrusts threatening to tear him apart while large hands curled sharp around his hips.

Growling, Severus flopped onto his back and scowled down at Bump – who was now almost perfectly framed by his hips, the sharp cuts softening just a little.

"Behave today," he ground out, smoothing his palm downward over the swell of his stomach. "I've got to brew the werewolf's potion, and pregnancy hormones are the *last* thing I need when dealing with that idiot." He thought he felt Bump give an almost gentle twist of understanding under his hand, but the idea was washed away as nausea cramped at his abdomen.

Groaning, Severus managed to get to his feet. In the bathroom, he finally removed the bandage from around the popped collarbone, his fingers travelling the expanse of the bone far rougher than they should have. But his body offered no protestations, and the seam felt as though it had mended.

"Glad to finally see you eating," the mirror offered up breathily, as his fingers tracked the cleave of his collarbone once more. "I always thought you needed more meat on your bones."

Pursing his lips, Severus completely ignored the enchanted glass

and retreated to the bedroom. He dressed slowly, not for the first time wishing he wore fewer clothes. But if he forwent any of his layers, he would feel vulnerable, exposed. And he was feeling weak enough in his current state to not invite anymore feelings of unease in.

It was still early enough that the castle seemed empty, halls all barren of children as he made his way up to the Infirmary. Though, Severus supposed they were all at breakfast. Poppy, like himself, normally only had tea for the first meal of the day, so he was unworried of finding the hospital wing empty.

"I just put the kettle on, dear," Poppy called out the moment he stepped into the Infirmary, already charming his robes open.

"Sounds lovely, but I think I'll forgo tea this morning." He laid his robes and vest over the back of the chair, starting on his shirt.

"Stomach still acting up?"

"A bit," Severus admitted, laying down on the bed. His hands automatically framing the place where Bump met ribs. He pressed a little, smoothing the skin slowly.

Poppy tutted, her fingers cupping Bump. "Really dear, you ought to be better to your father. He's thin enough without you inadvertently turning him bulimic." Already she was casting the basic inquisitive spell, looking for any indication that the whole endeavor had taken a downward spiral.

Severus scoffed. "I am hardly bulimic."

The mediwitch gave him a look. "Anything you're eating is thrown up within three hours – that's fairly close to bulimia."

Rolling his eyes, Severus let it drop as she continued on with her examination of his body.

"Anything . . . new with the pregnancy, feelings or anything?" With her eyebrows drifting near her hairline, the look she was giving him was downright suggestive, and Severus flushed.

"Ah – there does seem to be an increase of hormones," he grumbled, hand pressed over his eyes, so he didn't have to look at her face.

"I was wondering if you'd be experiencing that just yet!" Her fingers kept kneading at his skin, checking his liver and kidneys for anything out of the ordinary. "You're out of your first trimester; baby is the size of a lemon, and all the books say you'll be experiencing an increased sex drive for the next few months."

He flushed. Even though they were both of the scientific profession, even though Poppy had seen him naked and nearly dead – he still flushed. "Well isn't that fucking splendid," Severus bit out, sitting up as her hands left his skin.

"I'm very curious to see how closely a lycanthrope caused pregnancy runs to a Wizarding or Muggle one," she continued, giving him a bright look. "Are you keeping a journal of any kind?"

"Poppy." Severus pinched at the bridge of his nose, pulling in a deep breath. "Thus far, the pregnancy has consisted of retching my very soul out every day and a substantial lack of sleep. It has hardly been note-worthy." He cleared his throat as he moved to the edge of the bed. "And now you're telling me it's normal for me to have an extraordinarily high sex drive at this point in time."

"You wouldn't have to write your sexual exploits down. But . . . perhaps consider it? About the pregnancy, not your sex life. I think it would be very helpful to the Wizarding World at large to document it. After all, surely you're not the *only* unfortunate soul to have been thrown into an accidental pregnancy involving a werewolf."

Groaning, Severus tugged on his shirt and began to do up the buttons. "Stop mentioning that mess of a Gryffindor. I'm not looking forward to brewing his potion the next few days, so I would appreciate it if you would just pretend as though Lupin was of no consequence in all this."

"Just remember to keep your hands to yourself this time," she chimed, thoroughly stilling his fingers on his vest buttons.

Severus leveled the most scathing glare he possessed at the smirking mediwitch, his nostrils flared in irritation, jaw clenched. "It was a one-time thing, after far too much to drink," he ground out, disdain dripping from each syllable.

"Drunk you is merely less inhibited, Severus. It probably did you good – a proper fucking after so long of having to keep yourself so tightly under wraps. Was it twenty years' worth, I wonder?"

Again, he leveled a glare at her, charming his robes closed. "We're not having this conversation." He ignored her soft huff of laughter.

"Do give it some thought – a journal or something, Severus. I think it would be a milestone in dark creature studies."

Snorting, Severus left the Infirmary. Of course, he hadn't really given it any thought – documenting his unfortunate situation, but he could see its merits. He settled himself at his desk, eying his quill for a moment before he pulled a blank sheet of parchment to him and began to write. The nib scratched its way across the sheet, detailing everything from how the whole situation had come to pass to his experience thirteen weeks in. He left nothing out, recalling all the painful details – even ones he hadn't told Poppy about like the dizziness and spells of unconsciousness, the broken collarbone, the overly sore ribs.

As students filed into the classroom, Severus finally got to his feet. He surveyed them – First Year Slytherins and Gryffindors who squirmed in their seats under his intense gaze.

"Today you'll be writing a three-foot essay on the importance of potions to the Wizarding World as a whole and explaining how you feel as though you've improved as a student regarding this class." He gave them a stifling look, daring any of them to groan. "You'll also be as silent as the grave whilst writing. Any noise will result in fifty points from each House, every time I hear anything."

He terrorized each class in that manner, if only to give himself time to mentally prepare for being in close quarters with Lupin later that night.

After his final class, Severus set about brewing the Wolfsbane, mind acutely aware of each step. In most cases of brewing, he had perfected the art of working on autopilot, his fingers knowing the steps as though someone were reading the instructions aloud. But he always took the time to mentally recite each step as he completed it while brewing Wolfsbane.

Which, he wryly thought, *probably comes from almost being a meal for a werewolf twice.*

And while he was grateful for the distraction that the tedious potion provided, Severus couldn't exactly shake the almost anticipation of Lupin being in the room with him.

He managed to make it all the way through the brewing before Bump twisted his guts hard enough to send him to the sink, retching up his meals of peppermint and chamomile. His body quivered weakly, and his legs folded. Touching a hand to his temple, Severus sat on the floor – grateful that Lupin was punctual but *rarely* early. He had some time to collect himself then – before the lycanthrope was in the Dungeons.

Sighing, Severus tried to beat back the more carnal feelings puddling in his thoughts – namely arousal, especially as he remembered Lupin had tasted like dark chocolate and malt whisky and had possessive hands. Shaking his head, Severus tried to get to his feet, but found his knees refused to lock.

"Perhaps I just lie here," he grumbled lowly to himself.

"You're too bony to be lying on the floor, even with all the layers," Lupin quipped from the doorway, and Severus tried to scramble into a standing position as the werewolf strode forward. He only managed to be slowed down by said layers.

Severus tried desperately hard to ignore the heat of Lupin's hands curling around his biceps and gently tugging him to his feet, the counter against his back while Lupin hovered near his front. He absolutely *was not* thinking of how easy it'd be to tug the lighter man close enough for a kiss, or the way Lupin would *surely* press him back against the counter and reciprocate. Grimacing, Severus

promptly cut that train of thought and grabbed up the goblet, thrusting it at Lupin, all the while trying to ignore the hot coil of arousal curling around his spine, pooling in his hips.

"Drink," he snapped out.

The werewolf's breathing was decidedly heavier, and Lupin was giving him a curious look, eyes darkening into something hungrier as a hot hum spread itself thickly over Severus's thoughts. The lighter man gave him the ghost of a wolfish smile, and Severus paled. His mind, fretfully, finally worked out that Lupin could probably smell his arousal.

"I don't have time for this Lupin. Drink."

"Are you sure," Lupin asked, a step closer so the goblet and Severus's hand pressed against his chest. Still that same deep breathing followed by the abrupt notion of Lupin smelling him. "You could make the time, I think."

That expression is positively a leer, Severus thought, trying to ignore the quiver in his limbs. He was certainly *not* standing in the Dungeons getting hard.

"Drink."

Lupin's fingers curled around his, accepting the chalice, and Severus jerked his hand back. It would do him no good to remember the warmth of those fingers tracing patterns on his skin sometime just before sunrise. The werewolf drank, licking his lips in a way left Severus feeling rather more frazzled than all the moments before.

"I'll send the rest of your doses to your rooms," Severus ground out, pushing Lupin back and heading toward his office. "I think you're aware enough of the necessity of the potion that I can expect you to drink it all without having to watch you."

"I rather like you watching me. Almost as much as I like watching you." Lupin's tone was pitched low, rasping against his eardrums. It mixed headily with that hot thrum of Lupin's emotion at the back of his skull in a particular way that made Severus toy with the notion

of inviting the other into his rooms.

"I'll send the doses to your rooms," he maintained, finally escaping into his office and shutting the door sharply, disappearing into his rooms – in desperate need of a cold shower.

14 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a peach

"I'm so glad you joined me," Albus said, eyes twinkling as Severus sat down.

He made a noise in the back of his throat. "As though I had a choice, Headmaster."

"You always have a choice, dear boy. Surely, you know that."

Of course, various memories from the last twenty years attested to a rather different viewpoint, but Severus let it go – choosing to sip at his tea instead. The minty flavor steeped into his tongue and rather left him wishing for a strong cup of oolong.

"So . . . Poppy tells me you're, ah – filling out nicely, my boy."

Severus choked on his tea, the scalding liquid taking his trachea to his lungs and leaving him spluttering pitifully. Albus pounded roughly on his upper back, face creased in concern.

"Are you all right, Severus?"

Sucking in a deep breath through his nose once the coughing had calmed, Severus managed to offer up a tight-lipped almost-smile. "Perfectly fine." He took a sip of tea. A cramp bit at his stomach, twisting itself up in his intestines. Letting out a puff of breath, Severus pressed his hand to the side of Bump, applying the pressure he was rapidly discovering the little devil liked.

Dumbledore was giving him a look, eyes glittering and moist. "Oh dear," the older man muttered, obviously enthralled.

"Quite." Severus rubbed his stomach gently, peering down at the place Bump resided. So far, the teaching robes were still roomy enough to hide his growing belly. His shirt and vest were only a

little tight – he hadn't had to magic them bigger yet.

"Perhaps you would be more comfortable without the robes," Dumbledore asked, eyebrows lifting with his tone.

"I'm fine," Severus bit out sipping his tea, trying to shake the distastefulness of Albus suggesting he disrobe. He watched warily as the Headmaster leaned forward in his chair.

"My dear boy," Albus started, eyes unbelievably bright and soft as he spoke. "Do you mind . . ." and he trailed off, hands lifted in a question of permission – then, taking Severus's silence as consent, were cupping his belly through the thick wool of his academic robes.

Severus was shocked into motionlessness, staring down at the foreign hands spread along his baby bump. Though he supposed it was something he should begin to get accustomed to – it seemed as though every time Minerva managed to catch him alone, her hands were automatically cupping Bump.

The gesture, he found, was rather intimate – and looking down at those wrinkled, ancient fingers standing starkly white against his black robes making Severus very grateful he had kept them on. Pressure mounted in his chest, but he beat the stress back – reminding himself this was *Albus Dumbledore,* the man who had taken such great lengths upon himself to save Severus time and time again. Bump gave a flutter, a half-shift in its bed of his guts, and Albus positively cooed.

"Oh my! You're rather active for being so young!" Dumbledore flashed Severus an enchanted smile. "A future quidditch player, perhaps?"

He made a noncommittal noise in the back of his throat.

"Poppy said that the baby – Bump, I think you call it? – is the size of a lemon?" Another cheerful smile. "How *delightful*, my dear boy!"

"A peach," he corrected, resisting the urge to pull away from the older man. Those hands were still on Bump, and Severus was

beginning to get anxious. He wondered at what point it would be appropriate to *kindly* tell Albus to take his hands off him.

"Have you told Remus, then," the Headmaster asked; gaze still wistfully focused on Bump – as though he was suddenly regretting his decision to never have children of his own, to never be able to dote on grandchildren. Even though the older wizard had devoted his life to the education, safety, and upbringing of Hogwarts's students, Severus knew there was a sizeable difference.

"It hasn't come up," he remarked, placing his tea down and trying to discretely shy away from the continued contact with the Headmaster. Dumbledore just moved with him, maintaining the tender grip on Bump as though Severus had merely shifted in discomfort due to the growing child in his belly.

"He asks after you, you know." An almost conspiratorial smile. "We have tea at least once a week, and somehow your name always comes up."

"How quaint," Severus remarked drily, trying not to glower at the older wizard.

"Oh yes, he certainly cares for you Severus," Albus continued, smiling gaily. Drawing in a deep breath, Severus pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Do try to keep from discussing me during your Potter Fanclub meetings. Lupin seems rather unable to take a hint, and I don't want you giving him any encouragement."

The older wizard leaned forward, and for a second, Severus was worried that Dumbledore was going to rub his cheek against Bump. The mounting anxiety in his chest was a keen sensation, making his chest tight. He drew in a breath, trying to calm his nerves.

"I think Remus would rather enjoy the opportunity to be a father, Severus." A soft smile. "And I certainly know he'd like the opportunity to be with you." Bushy eyebrows lifted suggestively.

"My relationship – or lack thereof – with Lupin is none of your

concern, Headmaster."

He really wished Albus would let him go, but aside from prizing the elder's hands from Bump, Severus still hadn't worked out a polite way out of Dumbledore's touch. And while, as a rule, Severus Snape didn't *do* politeness, he figured he owed Albus enough to at least *try*. Thankfully, Dumbledore let him go and sat back in his chair, humming to himself as he cast a rewarming spell on his tea. Severus let out an imperceptible sigh and picked up his own cup. The peppermint had cooled substantially, despite the charmed cup, and left an almost chalky note on his tongue – making him scowl. He set his teacup back down, grimacing. Albus had begun to ramble on about something, and he was trying to get invested to be involved in the conversation – but he felt very tired and worn thin.

Severus touched just under his nose, feeling a little drip and rubbing the side of his index finger against it to collect it. He was a little unsettled to see his pale skin brushed with a smear of red. Hastily he snatched up a napkin and pressed it to his nose, head tilting back.

"Is everything all right, dear boy," Albus asked, tone bordering on infuriately calm concern.

"Just a nosebleed – increased blood flow and whatnot for the baby," he griped, words slightly muffled. "But I do think that I will retire for the evening, Headmaster," Severus said, getting to his feet, feeling a touch lightheaded.

He'd had nosebleeds before – after all, his nose was rather large and made for an obvious target when his sometimes-shitty attitude got the better of him when he was younger or in the company of baser acquaintances. Not to mention, several potions had fumes that managed to make the inside of his nostrils feel as though he'd scrubbed the sensitive, thin skin with bleach. However, he was not used to the lightheaded feeling that accompanied that particular nosebleed. The world greyed slightly before resuming full color.

"Of course, Severus. Thank you for having tea with me."

Giving a curt nod, Severus managed to leave the office without

bumping into anything, head still tilted slightly. He pinched harder at his nostrils, as though he could stem the blood flow by sheer pressure as he made his way down the stairs. By the time he reached the Dungeons, Severus was able to pull the napkin from his face, the white cloth spotted with bright red.

Sighing, he spoke the password to his rooms and entered.

15 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a navel orange

He was crawling out of his skin with want. It was infuriating – as though every fucking nerve ending over every inch of his skin was hypersensitive. The thin cotton of his shirt managed to feel like silk, and the rough wool of his robes drove him to madness slowly.

"Damn," he gasped out, squirming in his seat – positively blushing with his teeth gritted. Severus pressed his palm over his eyes and drew in a shaky breath.

Minerva cackled at him as Poppy leaned forward to fill their teacups.

"Oh hush, it's a very normal part of pregnancy," Poppy chided the older professor, giving the other witch a sternish look – undermined by the smile tugging at the corners of her lips. "He can't help it."

"Please stop talking about me like I'm not in the room," he ground out, picking his teacup – peppermint for his benefit – and taking a sip, glaring at the two women around the china rim.

"I'm sure Remus would gladly acquiesce if you'd only ask him." Minerva gave him a look. "You probably wouldn't even have to ask him nicely. Just . . . demand it."

"Besides, it's not as though you can get into *more* trouble," Poppy agreed with an almost shrug, motioning to Bump. "It's already the size of an orange; just going to get bigger – and I wouldn't think you could have two separate pregnancy timelines at once."

"We also didn't think he could get pregnant, or that he would bottom for Remus Lupin either," Minerva quipped to Poppy, tone playful as she gave him a sly look that managed to make his blood boil.

Severus snorted, putting his tea down so that he could fully focus on giving both witches the biggest *fuck you* glare he could manage.

"I'd rather die than lie down with that cur again," he scoffed, scowling angrily. "Besides, *this* would be rather hard to explain away," he muttered with a vague gesture waved at his torso. "Even an idiotic werewolf would be able to figure out I'm pregnant."

"He does deserve to know, Severus – at some point," Minerva said, giving him a somewhat disapproving look over the rim of her teacup.

"I'm fairly sure I tell him that once a month," Poppy intoned, giving him a pointed glare. "If not more."

"One-time thing," he ground out, putting his teacup down and resting his hands along the swell of Bump.

"Oh, come on, Severus! Remus *cares for you*!" Minerva had thrown her hands into the air in exasperation. "He bloody well *mopes* when you don't grace the Hall with your *charming* presence!" Her tone bordered on sarcastic as she leveled yet another pointed look in his direction.

"He's an *imbecile* then. Lupin should know better than to entertain feelings for me – the thought of us together. I mean really, though – he tried to *eat me* after all!" Severus shouted, giving them both a sharp look.

"Really Severus, don't bring bedroom antics into this," Poppy said drolly, smirking only at the corners of her eyes. Minerva cackled again, covering her eyes as great peals of laughter left her mouth.

He was certainly *not* blushing. "There's nothing between us. Nor will there be." Severus said it with as much rancor as he could manage.

"For Merlin's sake – just fuck him then," Minerva manage to bite out once her laughter had subsided. "Throw the dog a bone – preferably yours. Maybe it'll knock your hormones back into line and your mood swings will stop! You've been downright catty!"

Severus drew in a deep breath through his nose and got to his feet.

"Severus, you're being melodramatic," Poppy started, her hand grasping at his forearm. "Just sit down and drink your tea, love. You'll upset the baby."

"I have some marking to finish," Severus drawled, lips pursed together in a tight line. The speed at which he left the Infirmary rather pointedly indicated he was fleeing – which was something he had never done, nor would ever do. Merely, he was feeling the very pressing need to finish marking the homework from the Third Year students he had collected late last week.

He was scowling at the floor, not really paying any mind to where he was going – after all, he wasn't exactly the type of person a student or even a fellow professor would carelessly run into. Unless of course, the other person felt the overwhelming urge to be reduced to a puddle of tears. So, when a warm hand wrapped around his arm, pulling him to a stop – it nearly choked a moan from his lungs. The pressure of fingers bore down delightfully into his skin as Severus glanced upward, feeling the sentiment turn to anger as Lupin smiled at him softly.

"Severus?"

He scowled, wrenching his arm free – or tried to, but those fingers remained curled around his bicep, deceptively strong.

"Lupin," he growled in acknowledgement and warning, only vaguely aware of students giving them looks in passing and realizing they were standing in the center of the hall. With Lupin effectively holding him in place as Severus scowled darkly.

The werewolf somehow managed to crowd him backward, pressing him to the wall if only to remove them from the flow of foot traffic. But he found he was rather enjoying the manhandling, the pressure of the wall against his back. Severus tried to clamp down on the mounting arousal in his stomach.

Lupin offered brief smiles to a few students, before turning golden hazel eyes on him, lips moving around words that he couldn't make himself hear.

Rather, Severus was trying to think extremely pointedly about something – absolutely fucking anything, *anything* – other than how intimate the whole thing was. Lupin was close enough that the hems of their robes brushed, and he was all too *aware* of the werewolf's body temperature. The hand squeezed, pressing him back against the wall, and really – his eyes fell closed of their own accord. He could hardly be blamed for the action.

He was having a hard time disentangling the heady thrum of his want from that of Lupin's – which was making things decidedly worse. He bit the inside of his cheek aggressively, trying to ground himself.

"Severus," Lupin snapped, much too *there*, hovering well within his personal space. "Are you all right?"

He made a noise – embarrassingly reedy – as he forced his eyes open. Lupin's head had cocked, giving him a look that was decidedly *not* for a rather busy hallway, as though the sound had been an admission, an invitation, a plea. So, if he were honest, the noise probably wasn't something that should have uttered from his throat anywhere near the student body – regardless of how involuntary it may have been.

"Fine," Severus muttered, hand pressing against his temple aggressively. His fingers were shaking, and admittedly his knees as well.

"You didn't hear a word I said, did you." It wasn't a question, but he felt he should answer it anyway.

"Of course I did. I'm not a dolt," he snarled quietly, brow furrowing as he glared at the werewolf. Who merely raised his eyebrows, a smile tugging at his lips.

"So . . .?"

Of course, he hadn't heard what Lupin had said – sensations short-circuiting his brain's higher functions and whatnot – but there were only a few things he figured the lycanthrope could be asking him. All the things Severus could think of – while admittedly sounding

delightful right then, especially as want crawled its way across his skin – would just lead to more issues down the road and would *not* be happening.

"No."

Lupin, for all appearances, seemed to loom closer, resulting in a pleasantly crippling heat swamping Severus, breath stirring his hair and cheek like a caress. His chest touched lightly against the point of Severus's shoulder as he seemingly curled around Severus's personal space.

"You're sure?" The werewolf's voice was pitched low, confusion trembling in the sonances – as though asking himself how he'd managed to mix up signals.

Severus gripped tightly at his robes on the side opposite Lupin, clenching at the thigh just under the coarse fabric to try and center himself. Otherwise, that hand would be knotted in Lupin's robes, pulling him closer. And a wide variety of terrible things would have spilled out of Severus's mouth much like begging – to touch him, kiss him, just fuck him against the wall already.

And, as Minerva had pointed out, Lupin would happily acquiesce.

Which was *decidedly* a bad idea.

So instead, Severus pressed a shaky hand to Lupin's chest and pushed – completely ignoring every instinct in his poor, hormone addled brain – when all he wanted to do was pull. He breathed out heavily through his nose and pushed harder, until Lupin wasn't crowding him anymore. He pushed himself off the wall, smoothing down his robes in an attempt to collect himself.

"A definite no, Lupin. And I rather doubt it will ever be a yes."

And he resumed his walk to the Dungeons – he had marking to complete, no matter how tempting Lupin may have been with his hungry eyes and eager hands; no matter how he could still the lingering heat of the other, all possessive touch and kiss. No matter how much Severus *wanted,* because want was a very dangerous

thing as he had learned.

After all, *want* had led him there – had it not? To his life culminating into an ex-Death Eater nearing forty with limited prospects for the future aside from continuing to teach children who didn't really want to learn . . . and pregnant with a werewolf's child. Hadn't *want* fucked him royally, taking one night of drunken passion – filled with the willingness to go to bed with another, to succumb to the lycanthrope trying so hard *for him* – and turning his life once more into one of servitude?

He stopped for a moment, let the sigh pull itself from his chest tiredly. Because his life laid bare like that was gut-wrenchingly terrible but true, nonetheless. But Severus squared his shoulders and resumed the walk to his quarters, refusing to feel sorry for himself.

Of course, Severus found Minerva waiting patiently by his office door, hands folded into her sleeves as though she had all the time in the world to wait for him.

"There you are . . . thought you might have gotten lost," she teased him, which Severus took as the subtle apology that it was. After all, they had worked alongside one another for over fifteen years. They had learned one another, well enough to bicker and banter, to push and push and push without truly overstepping. Never digging a trench that could not be crossed.

"Lost? It's as easy as falling downward. I'd have to be a Gryffindor to get lost," Severus sneered, letting the corners of his mouth twist upward almost playfully.

Minerva offered up a snort of amusement as she followed him into the office. She folded herself into the chair opposite of him – and Severus was reminded of all the nights they had spent like that, swapping stories of insolent students and sipping fine whisky.

"Albus is worried about you, you should know. We all are."

Severus leant back in his chair; hands folded on the slight swell of his stomach. "Albus likes to meddle."

"He's particularly worried over one of his favorite golden boys."

He flinched, lips twisting sourly. "Don't call me that. Roping me in with Black and his lot." Severus scowled quietly, glaring rather formidably at the stone floor.

"If I recall – it was your arse he saved from the fire. Not Mister Black's." Minerva gave him a look, somehow managing to propel Severus back over the years to youthful stupidity and the naivety of wanting to belong. He grimaced.

"Merely trying to make amends for letting me stray down the wrong path, I'm sure."

"Severus," she started, tone taking a flintstone edge. "You're smarter than that."

"Did you just come to chastise," Severus bit out, sniffing in disdain as he shattered that train of conversation – unwilling to further address it.

"I wanted to check on you, perhaps have some tea. You've been terrible remiss as of late, and I find I miss our late-evening rants."

Heaving out a sigh, Severus got to his feet and regarded the older witch. He was exhausted, and his insides cramped . . . but the lure of a normal evening felt too great. Already, Severus could imagine it, as they sat in the sitting room and sipped blisteringly hot tea, telling stories of students who didn't really want to learn and horribly penned essays.

"Well . . . all right then, let's go put the kettle on," he succumbed, pushing open the door to his rooms with yet another sigh – trusting Minerva would follow him inside.

16 Weeks - Your baby is the size of an avocado

Standing in his office, glowering at the pile of papers loitering on the desk, Severus slowly removed his outer robes – they were too stifling for the menial task at hand – and settled in the hard desk chair. Since no one would be by, he figured he could forgo the imposing façade. Chamomile tea cooled on the blotter.

Letting out a heavy sigh, he rested his hand along the slight curve of his stomach – Bump was the size of an avocado and could hear him, Poppy had said.

"Shall we see what the brats have to say this week," he asked Bump, giving it a little rub. The nausea had begun to slacken marginally, but it seemed the little one stilled most at touch. Glancing downward, he beat back the feelings of body dysmorphia – which had only begun to increase fervently as his shirts and vests stretched tight against his torso. He had always been lanky, nearly bordering on emaciated, so the extra weight – fullness rather – was a completely foreign feeling. Though not necessarily unpleasant. But definitely not what he wanted, missing that whetted sharpness of cut-glass edges and razorblade lines his body had had for so long.

But Severus just offered up another sigh, shifting his body around in his desk chair and lifting his quill, rolling it between his fingers mindlessly as he pulled the essays closer. Taking a sip of his tea and grimacing at the taste, he dipped his quill and began grading essays.

"Oh. Listen to this drivel," he said with a snort a short time later, his hand slipping down to cup the underside of the bump. "*I think the best potion type is bone regrowth serum. Without it I couldn't play quidditch, because I fall off too much.*" Rolling his eyes, Severus shook his head. "Really though. Granted, bone regrowth serums are incredibly useful, Bump. But for *quidditch* – idiotic. The Crabbe lineage should have died out long ago."

Bump twisted under his fingers, seemingly in agreement. As he scrawled hastily across the essay, red ink bleeding all over the unsuspecting parchment; a knock banged on the door, thoroughly startling him. Severus jerked, marring the essay where he hadn't intended.

"Damn," he growled.

The knocking – banging rather – continued, causing the nausea to flare up. He sipped the now cold tea, praying whoever was at his door would go away. Would-be visitors normally did, if he ignored them long enough. However, Severus briefly considered putting his robes on once more – just in case, but then the knocking stopped. And he breathed a sigh of relief as he returned his attention to the task at hand – only for the fireplace to belch out green fumes and for one Remus Lupin – current bane of his existence – to stumble out awkwardly into the room.

"Severus, you *have got to eat* at some point – stop being a child. You don't have to avoid me! I'm not going to jump you in the Great Hall, tempting as that may be," Lupin grumbled playfully, as he brushed soot off his slightly worse-for-wear robes. "I would have brought you dinner, but I was unsure I'd get this far without you kicking me out on my arse fast as anything."

The look on Lupin's face should have been comical as he came around the desk and took note of Severus's stomach. Comical – if the whole situation weren't somewhat serious. Not that he was afraid of Lupin, but simply he was aware that the situation could have several outcomes. Unthinkingly, Severus moved his hand just slightly, in a protective motion over Bump.

"Sev . . . ah," Lupin started and lazily trailed off only to resume. "Are you . . . Is it . . . But why . . ."

"Articulate as ever, Lupin. If you would finish a damn question, perhaps I would feel generous enough to give you an answer," he bit out silkily. That fuzzy trace of Lupin's feelings at the back of his skull gave off muted vibes of confusion, keeping a hold on Lupin's tongue.

"He's at a loss for words, Bump," he sneered softly, rubbing the soft curve.

Then Lupin was in front of him, yanking the chair around so he could see better. Severus leaned back in the chair, trying to put space between them until he knew how Lupin would react – which was to promptly melt to his knees on the floor, some kind of whimper caught high in his throat as his hands cupped Bump. Lupin's lips brushed the back of his hand, his cheek pressed against it until Severus threaded his long fingers through greying hair, tugging almost sharply to get Lupin's attention.

"At risk of you becoming a blathering idiot once more, yes – to both," he finally said, trying to bite back the fuzzy, not-nearly-so-muted feelings of joy and something like devotion. Under Lupin's feelings, even his own chest felt tight. Lupin's head on his belly looked a little bit like home. Bump gave a soft flutter, reaffirming the realness of life, and then Lupin was straightening only to kiss him hungrily.

Fingers knotted in his hair, keeping his mouth slotted against Lupin's, and he bit back a whimper. Then there was heavy breathing in his ear. "Merlin, Severus. Don't you know how you look? Sitting there, all prim and proper and swollen with my child. Fuck! Why didn't you tell me?"

Kisses pressed almost aggressively against his skin, and Severus bit at his bottom lip to keep from moaning. The hormones, which had finally been beaten back, were roaring back to life – and it took everything he had not to pull the lighter man to him. Lupin had moved closer, nearly straddling one of his thighs. Fingers were tight in his hair. Finally, he had enough sense to push the lycanthrope back and drew in a deep breath through his nose. Lupin's fuzzy feelings at the back of his skull were making it rather hard to think straight.

"Because Lupin," he somehow managed to sneer, even with his thoughts strung together with lust, "we both know that werewolves do not, in fact, mate for life. It was a one-off. Why should I burden you with knowledge of a child you don't have to have anything to do with."

The hurt that welled up in those peculiar eyes was unexpected, but Severus refused to let his thinking be swayed by Gryffindor stupidity and sense of duty. Fighting back the arousal, he cocked an eyebrow haughtily and peered down his nose at the werewolf.

"Burden?" Lupin swallowed hard, a tiny furrow appearing between eyebrows. "We made a child together. Why would that ever be a burden? How could you ever be a burden?"

He gritted his teeth against the obvious lie. "Leave."

If Lupin had been hurt before, he was rapidly approaching devastated. The static at the back of his head was giving him a headache, all awash in something like despair.

"Leave? Severus – we should talk about this . . ." Lupin started, even as he clamored to his feet. There was something desperate in his motions, as though he could scramble to his feet and hover anxiously over Severus until the darker man changed his mind.

A mood switch flipped somewhere in his brain – had been flipping. From the thought of fucking on his desk, to wanting nothing but space, to wanting to absolutely destroy the moronic Gryffindor in front of him.

"*Talk*," he drawled, voice suddenly low and dangerous. Severus forced himself to his feet, body mere inches from Lupin's as he glowered. "You want to *talk*. Listen very – and I do mean *very* – closely. We, this . . . it's nothing. I will not be an obligation because *you're* too much of a *fucking Gryffindor* to admit that."

Lupin's face crumpled, and Severus managed to take a small amount of joy in that broken expression.

"Now that we've *talked*, leave." The tone brooked no argument.

That time, there was no fight as Lupin slunk from his office.

And that evening, he made himself attend dinner in the Great Hall, unwilling to sulk in his rooms – to put emphasis behind what he had told Lupin; to show the werewolf that it was nothing.

The Hall was simply – too much. Too many smells, too many noises, too many people. He hated every second of it, as Severus sat there. His belly ached; the food tasted abysmal; his head hurt. But he told himself it was all worth it, when he caught a muted sense of pining every time Lupin glanced toward his end of the table. Not that it occurred consistently – the lycanthrope allowed himself to converse with Flitwit after all, but it was often enough. He would be willing to wager if he'd approached his peer, the other man would have whined pitifully until Severus spoke to him. And Severus even made himself sit through coffee and dessert, listening to the almost drunken ramblings of Sybill Trelawney.

Fingers touched his elbow, and he allowed his attention to be pulled away from the mess of a professor in front on him.

"Are you feeling all right," Minerva asked, her voice pitched low in a way that made it *obviously* aware that she was talking about his situation – namely his situation with Bump. Who then promptly took it upon itself to squirm rather heavy in its bed of his entrails.

"Did you finally . . . you know."

And he did know. Obviously, he wasn't the only one picking up on the werewolf's sudden distance, tiptoeing cautiously around Severus as though the darker man might bite.

"Did I what," he asked, snark curling his letters as he uttered them. The older professor glared at him, wise to his game – but she played along anyway.

"Finally tell Remus," she hissed out, head tilting toward the opposite side of the table.

"No. I did not," he drawled, tone dry and unhurried as he took a sip of his peppermint tea. The taste, while still better than the chamomile, left him yearning for a strong, black cup of Irish breakfast – it also did little to settle his nausea, and the Great Hall was certainly no place for him to coddle Bump. Minerva had blanched beside him, so he gave her a sideways look. "He *discovered* it. On his own."

Her head leaned in toward him, eyes glittering curiously behind her glasses. "Really, now? I'm surprised that you would allow yourself to be in such a position for *this* to be discovered."

He snorted. "I was marking in my office. Not too many people have enough nerve to enter when the door is shut, and no reply is forthcoming from within."

"Ah," she uttered, finally understanding the magnitude of the situation.

"Yes. It was quite stupidly Gryffindorish of him." The House fell from his lips like a curse.

"And you pulled House, I'm sure. Showed him the cruelty of Slytherin." Her voice, while dry, was lilting in its humor. She'd managed to find the whole thing funny, which eased the tightness in his chest. "Well. He looks fine, so you mustn't have hexed him too badly." She took a sip of her tea, glancing at him smugly. "Did you make him cry." It had been meant as a joke, but he felt a muscle near his lips twitch. "Oh, Severus – really," Minerva bemoaned and gone was the smug humor of her tone, replaced by exasperation. "The man *cares* for you, and you've gone and made him *cry*?"

"No, I didn't make him cry," he snapped. Suddenly, the tea wasn't helping soothe the nausea at all.

"Severus are you all right," Minerva chirped, her voice suddenly pinched in worry.

"Ah – quite," he muttered. His face must have gone pale. Hurriedly setting the cup down, he clenched his fingers on the table, white-knuckled. "But I think I will retire – I have matters to attend to, ones that will not be ignored."

The call to the bathroom, much like that of Dark Mark, had begun to become commonplace – though no less painful – and he left the Hall.

As it was rapidly becoming, the rush to his quarters was a frantic race of trying to beat the impending surge of vomit and bile. The

door to his rooms swung open as he approached, mentally unlocked and pushed open wide, while he gritted his teeth tightly enough his jaw began to ache. Already, there was that all too familiar tightness of chest, the beginning burn along his throat, his mouth flooded with too much spit.

He stumbled into his rooms, determined to make it to the bathroom – which always seemed a daunting, nigh impossible task. But, Severus managed to make it into the bathroom, his long frame folding around the toilet bowl as his guts heaved and lurched – as he tried to expel everything he had consumed along with the lining of his stomach and the child growing within him. His eyes prickled, tears gathering at the corners as he struggled to breathe. But every attempted breath resulted in yet another round of heaves, the motion choking the air from his lungs and leaving him a gasping mess.

Severus rested his forehead against a quivering forearm, mouth open and panting as he tried valiantly to regain his breath. Bile-thickened saliva trembled from his lips. He sucked in a breath, rested a hand on the slight swell of Bump. His body ached, and the floor wasn't doing anything to help that.

Slowly, shakily, Severus got to his feet. He heaved a sigh and swiped a hand across his mouth while the other rubbed comforting circles along Bump. He made his way over to the sink and washed his mouth out.

"Oh dear, you look dreadful," the mirror tutted.

"One would think you'd be used to that," Severus ground out, giving the enchanted glass a sharp look. Of course, it was right though. His skin held a grey tint, was stretched much too tight over his cheekbones.

Dragging his hand through his hair, Severus let his shoulders pull downward. His hands rubbed gingerly along Bump, as though he could coax the baby into blessed stillness. "Perhaps a long soak and then bed, hmm?"

"That sounds lovely," the mirror crooned, earning it yet another

sharp look.

"Not you," Severus snapped, heading out of the mirror's line of sight to draw a bath.

17 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a pomegranate

He was rather firmly in the four-month mark, and Severus found he had less desire than ever before to see his body in any state of undress. Sitting next to his fireplace, Severus spread a long-fingered hand on Bump and pursed his lips. The fabric of his shirt had stretched tightly around the swell of Bump, the buttons pushed out like barbs.

"You had better be worth this," he ground out.

The steady pain around his lower back, resting heavy on his hipbones, cinched tightly around his spine. It choked a groan from his chest, making him grit his teeth. He squirmed in his seat, trying to find a comfortable spot and unable to. Apparently, boniness and pregnancy didn't mix well. Behind him, his doors charmed open, and he waited patiently for Poppy to find him.

"Really – you're making me perform house calls now?" She sighed, sounding very put-upon. Although the smile she graced him with as she entered the sitting room was of the exact opposite emotion. "You're very lucky you're my favorite Slytherin, Mister Snape," Poppy quipped, hands on her hips as she regarded him.

"It's starting to hurt if I stand too long, move too much," he grumbled, running palms along Bump anxiously.

"Already?" Poppy tutted, gesturing for him to stand and strip.

"That's not normal," he asked, as he charmed his robes and underclothes open. Flinching as a sharp pain tore at his side, Severus went about slowly removing the opened layers.

"I would think your body would be getting used to the extra weight by now," she muttered, urging him back onto the couch.

The quiet pulled long and taunt between them as Poppy looked down at him, and Severus resisted the urge to curl up on himself. "I thought you'd managed to keep some food down," she quietly uttered, the sadness apparent on her face.

"Take it up with Bump – I try, and it either tastes like ash or the texture is wrong or the smell is too much or," and he covered his face in his hands. Because he knew he was filling out, that the baby was pushing the wall of his abdomen out – but that didn't necessarily equate to weight gain. And seeing as the most substantial foodstuffs he had on most days was tea, he doubted there was any *substantial* weight gain. Her fingers were suddenly on his stomach, chasing the sharpness of ribs, the hollow spot at his sternum, the thinly stretched skin of his midriff. Finally, her finger traced – what he knew was a stretchmark – a dark line that arced up from his hip, reaching over the bottom swell of Bump.

"Feeling sick or anything," Poppy finally asked, her face pulled taunt in her nervousness.

"No. Should I?"

"Severus," she pinched the bridge of her nose, eyes squinted shut. "The baby is receiving nutrition somewhere, somehow. It wouldn't be growing like this, usual as expected if it wasn't."

He gave her a dark look – because he could see the points, see the logic she was using to string her points together.

"I don't want the baby sucking the nutrients from you. It could make you sick, love. It *will* make you sick." Poppy sighed, her soft eyes searching his for any sign of distress. "Maybe those Muggle protein shakes?"

"Poppy," he started, pushing himself into a sitting position, his palm automatically covering the vibrantly dark line against his pale skin. "If I can barely keep watered down tea down, what makes you think I can stomach a thick, chalky substance."

She sighed, ran her fingers through her hair. "I just . . ." she gave him a look, distraught. "I'm just losing, Severus. I want to keep you

healthy, but Bump has the exact opposite idea. It's roughly the size of a pomegranate, and it just . . . it bothers me."

Her hand swept the empty air between them, her fingers pointed toward him. "You look even skinnier than before, with this prominent bump. I had thought eventually the baby would have to let you eat, but now I'm afraid it's just leeching the minerals it needs from your bones, from the marrows of them."

Severus managed to offer up a small almost-smile. "Seems like I always sign up for the wrong side, hmm." Which earned him an exasperated huff and an eyeroll.

"Its safety and health shouldn't be provided at the expense of yours, Severus. You have to know that."

He shrugged, rubbing the swell of his stomach thoughtfully. Under his touch, Bump responded, twisting a little. Just a quiver of movement, but still – something warm bloomed in his chest, pulled the barest hints of a smile to his lips.

"Severus," she snapped out, even more exasperated than before – as though he should have agreed with her immediately.

Drawing in a deep breath, Severus lifted his gaze and gave her a look. "I've spent what feels like my whole life sacrificing my safety, my health for people who never knew me – or worse, people who knew me and hated me regardless of my sacrifice." He shrugged again. "This doesn't feel much different."

She threw her hands up, huffing out a heavy breath. And he watched her leave, unable to make himself give more of a damn.

Instead, he braced his lower back with a hand and hobbled off to his laboratory to begin brewing the werewolf's potion.

Standing at the worktable, Severus sighed and let his body move on autopilot – or as close as he would allow himself given the importance of the potion. He cut, sliced, ground, and crushed with hardly any thought at all. He gave himself over to the potion, lost himself in it. Let himself drown in the perfection that was brewing

the Wolfsbane, only glancing around when a knock resounded throughout his classroom, calling his attention firmly.

"Enter," he bade, voice calm and soft . . . the exact opposite of the jitters he felt.

The shock of Lupin having . . . discovered his secret was still new, was still fresh and bright in his mind. And did not put him in a position he wanted to be in. Because Lupin was a wild card – though all the werewolf's reactions edged in the positive direction. Lupin was too much of an unknown for Severus to properly gauge the situation, to discern what he should expect. Because years of *knowing* had rendered Dumbledore and Voldemort unsurprising in their methods, their actions . . . but Lupin had expressed the ability to not only leave the past in its grave, but a *desire* to.

How often had the other spent chasing Severus for conversation, since the final war, since the dust had settled – regardless of how caustic Severus was toward the lighter man.

In many situations, a kicked dog continued to be a loyal dog – accepting, tolerating of the situation, and allowing of the continued abuse. But in some, the dog turned and bit, hard and deep and fast. And Severus was . . . entirely too uncertain of which kind of dog Lupin was. Especially with a child on the way, with his suspicious nature and always prowling mind. Because Severus had no rest, always seeking for an out, a means for escape even if he was unfit or unwilling to escape. Because Severus had been the dog that bit – and dark might have called to dark, after too much to drink and too many lonely nights. But dark calling to dark did not tell him the kind of dog that Lupin was.

So, Severus bundled himself under all the layers of calm aloofness and lowly-simmering disdain that he could manage, watching Lupin slink across the classroom floor – looking for all the world like a kicked cur, pitiful and deserving of *some* sympathy. Lupin stopped before him, hands thrust down in his pockets while golden hazel eyes regarded Severus, glittering and almost predatory. As though Severus had once bared his throat to the other, would *always* eventually bare his throat to the wolf.

"Hello Severus, you're looking well."

Severus sniffed in disdain and held the other's potion out. "We're not here for niceties, Lupin. Drink and be on your way."

For a moment, Severus thought the cur might bite, might speak out of turn . . . but he merely took the chalice and upended the potion, gulping at the still steaming brew. The werewolf held the cup between fingertips, rolling it in thought.

"Severus . . ." Lupin started, eyes still firmly on the ground as if in some sort of submission.

"No," Severus bit out, holding his hand out and waiting for the werewolf to deposit the goblet within his grasp. He could hear all those words inside Lupin's tone, huddled together in some sort of spun-sugar fairytale that Severus would never be privy to. He was not a man made for – Fated for – that kind of life, he reminded himself firmly.

"But perhaps . . ." Lupin tried again, gaze finally lifting, meeting Severus's for the amount of time it too to draw a breath.

"Perhaps not, Lupin," he countered, letting a brow twitch upward haughtily as he shook his hand a bit in Lupin's direction. "Same time tomorrow." The cup thumped softly into his palm, and Severus let his fingers curl around the stem – taking some sort of strength from the act.

A slow heartbeat where they regarded one another – a small eternity stretching stickily, silently between them as Lupin peered up at him, drawing in a deep breath as though to say something else.

So, Severus took his leave, letting the door close behind him sharply.

He undid the buttons of his teaching robes by hand, breathing slowly as he went, plucking his armor free and leaving himself a worn-thin thing. The baby growing in his guts twisted sharply, nearly wringing a low grunt of pain from him as he made his way

toward the bedroom. But Severus swallowed it down. As he always did. As he always would. And he crawled into bed, pressing his face into the pillows and thinking of a day that the cur might bite.

18 Weeks - Your baby is the size of an artichoke

This is not the place to chide, Severus reminded himself, drawing in a deep breath through his nose, pinching the bridge sharply. Instead, he resolutely ignored the swift kick to his left kidney and leveled an irritated glare at the Fifth Year Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws. Discretely, he canted his hip against his desk, relieving a little of the pressure around his midriff with the change of position. Arms crossed over his chest, he verily demanded one of them try and fuck up, to allow him to unleash a small portion of his irritation. Of course, the source of irritation was Bump, and not the somewhat competent students before him – not that they needed to know that.

Already, Severus was counting the moments until the class would end so he could run fingers and palms along the suddenly feisty fetus.

Yet another kick to his kidney, and then higher – against his ribs.

Severus gritted his teeth against the sharp pop of pain, the sudden inability to draw in as deep a breath as he would have liked in his irritation. He reached for his tea, glowering at the ineffectual liquid – as the nausea still came in waves, though less frequently now. As though Bump merely wanted to keep him off-balance rather than starved. So, as it went, as long as the food had no flavor or texture to speak of, it was fine. Which left him with broth and tea – which was about as delightful as it sounded.

He managed to get through the rest of the class – without any explosions or boiled over potions. He glowered at each student as they filed out of the classroom, before heading for his office. In his office, Severus charmed his robes open and promptly dropped into his desk chair, hips pushed upward to straighten his spine as his hands roamed Bump.

"You're trying my patience today, brat," he griped, trying not to

focus overly long on the swollen fingers, the joints puffy. He flexed his fingers, as though he could will the swelling down – which had made it impossible to button his clothes without the help of the spell. As it was, his pants were rather snug against his hips.

Severus rubbed impatiently at his temple with one hand while the other coasted slowly along Bump, feeling the tight swell of his stomach under his shirt, having forgone the waistcoat. The buttons strained, and he was struck by the notion that soon he would need to magic the fabric larger. Which seemed absurd, given that the baby was only the size of an artichoke.

He pushed himself forward, resting on the edge of his seat so his body could curve to accommodate the writhing mass of Bump. He straightened marginally, shifting the pain from around his spine to rest rather firmly against his hips, crushing the cradle of his pelvic bone. A hand snuck behind his back, kneading at the ache near his spine.

Five more months of this, he groaned internally, snorting derisively. Five more months of sleepless nights and bland food, of raging hormones and perpetual aches. "Joy," Severus drawled, pulling his grading over in front of him, selecting his favorite quill and the deepest red ink he had. A slash of ink across the parchment looked suspiciously like blood, and Severus found himself almost smiling – almost. He imagined that the students would cringe when they received their essays back, partially from the color, as though their grades had bled onto the parchments.

Then he noticed the small box, its silver clasp glinting gaily in the light. Frowning, Severus held his fingers out toward the small box, calling it from where it loitered inconspicuously at the edge of his desk. Its little silver feet skidded across his desktop, snuggling itself under his fingertips. For a moment, his suspicious nature warned him against opening it – but most of the people who had it out for him had been captured, killed, or had fled in the final war. And he was *curious*.

His thumb popped the clasp open, his fingers pushing back the lid slowly. While Severus wasn't afraid of whatever was in the box, he also didn't want to unnecessarily get himself maimed. He drew in a

deep breath as he took in the softly glimmering pile of fairy wings. The box glittered on the inside, dusted with gossamer motes from iridescent wings.

Chewing his bottom lip, Severus regarded the relatively useful and rare potion ingredient.

While he generally didn't keep fairy wings in his personal stock, he could think of a million and one reasons to keep *these.* That thought drew a growl from his chest – as one of those reasons was the Girding Potion, which increased stamina and endurance.

"Lupin," he bit out, snapping the lid of the box shut. Promptly, he jerked open a desk drawer and deposited the box inside it. Begrudgingly, Severus pushed the thought of the fairy wings to the back of his mind and focused instead on marking up essays, on creating homework assignments, on devising dreadful pop quizzes for the students who hadn't bothered to read.

The next present came a couple of days later, when he was trying desperately to get his nose to stop bleeding, pinching his nostrils closed. Severus rummaged through the papers on his desk, the counters with his neck bent at an awkward angle so to keep his nose lifted but also so he could see what exactly he was looking at. His fingers brushed aside a periodical to reveal a silk bag tied with a golden ribbon.

Standing up straight abruptly, Severus pinched his nose tighter and breathed through his mouth, ignoring the lingering taste of bloody fumes on his lips from where he had noticed the nosebleed a second too late. Finally, he sat down and tilted his head back, staring at the ceiling of his office while he counted to five hundred in his mind, giving more than enough time for the nosebleed to calm down on its own. Eventually the bleeding abated, and the ability to straighten his neck resulted in an unpleasant sense of vertigo, his vision spotting, greying, blackening before righting. Severus splayed his fingers on his desktop and eyed the bag warily.

"Another present I'm sure," he scowled, his hand rubbing reflexively against his left side, where Bump tended to kick at his kidney and ribs. "Perhaps I won't open it," Severus finally said, leaning back in

his chair, spine impossibly straight to abate the ache the loitered in his vertebra.

Bump twisted softly under his hand, and he continued to glare at the bag.

"Damn," he finally bit out as curiosity got the better of him, fingers snatching the bag up and promptly spilling the contents out onto his desktop. Moonstones clattered along the surface, glimmering dully as they tumbled.

They were good-sized stones, particularly milky in their color – so not a cheap gift. Severus rolled one with his fingertip, inspecting the stone for imperfections which would be commonplace if Lupin had simply bought a bundle of them. But the stone, as well as the others he noted as he inspected each of them, were rather impeccable. All signs pointing toward hand selected.

He scowled, trying to figure out what the damned werewolf was getting at. Severus swept the stones back into their bag and left them on his desk. While the first potion that came to mind was the Draught of Peace, various love potions weren't far behind. Pressing his fingers to the corners of his eyes, pinching at the bridge of his nose there, Severus heaved a sigh and retired to his rooms, determined to put the stones out of his mind.

The rest of the week seemed to pass without any more unexpected presents from the seemingly lovesick Lupin, the days having drifted into the normal balance of things.

He made himself attend the staff meeting – sitting in his chair and watching dispassionately as Hooch railed on and on about . . . something. The mistreatment of the brooms, if he had to guess. And Severus doggedly ignored Lupin glancing in his direction, ignored that soft and curious emotion itching at the back of his skull. Albus glanced at him, offered up a pleased smile – taking note of his victory. And Severus rolled his eyes, glancing across the room at Minerva, who made a vague hand gesture.

Severus let himself sink further into his chair, gritting his teeth against the boredom of the meeting, letting his mind run through

the tasks he needed to complete over the weekend.

The pile of essays he still had to grade that loitered at the edge of his desk was steadily growing, edging on towering and thusly was at the top of his list of priorities. Which is what he always told himself but by the end of the day, feeling wrung-out and stretched thin, Severus figured he was just lucky to make it to his bed without stumbling overly much.

Hooch finally threw herself down in her chair with a huff, calling his attention back to the meeting. Slowly, Dumbledore got to his feet and looked around at all of them. Severus let his gaze sweep the room as well, finding all his peers just as interested in continuing the meeting as himself.

"I think we will conclude this meeting of the minds," Albus quipped, smiling brightly around the room and released them from their obligation, released them into the weekend.

Minerva cut across the lounge to him as Severus got slowly to his feet. "Are you still planning on having dinner with Poppy and myself tomorrow night?"

Severus was aware of Lupin eavesdropping, the bright itch of curiosity running rampant amongst his thoughts. He pinched the bridge of his nose to stave off the impending headache.

"Perhaps Sunday; I've so much bloody marking to do, Minerva." He hated the way his tone pulled down into exhaustion.

She cackled softly. "You do it to yourself."

He sighed. "I know. But they won't learn if they don't read." Which he knew was a lie, because most of their students read without retention. And the look Minerva gave him said she was thinking the same.

"I'll tell Poppy Sunday for sure – six o'clock. Don't be late, Severus." The older professor gave him a pointed look. "And do try to get some sleep this weekend; you look positively dead on your feet." And she left him alone – with Lupin.

Which Lupin seemed to take as an invitation.

"Severus," the werewolf started, stepping forward.

"No, Lupin," he bit out, heading for the door, suddenly desperate for his bed.

Which is where he spent the next two days, regretfully ignoring his marking – telling himself he could push it off just another week.

He did take dinner with Poppy and Minerva, for fear of being pulled from his quarters by his ear. In Minerva's rooms, enjoying soup and bread and decent conversation, Severus almost allowed himself to just be. And he let himself be coaxed into staying for tea – which might have been a mistake. Because Poppy tucked in against Minerva's side, looking soft and comfortable made something pang in his chest, some sort of fleeting desire to be willingly vulnerable like that. A softness that Lupin was seemingly offering. Which was promptly swept away, because that train of thought would do him no good. It had been a one-time thing, after all.

So he excused himself.

Heaving a sigh, Severus found himself in his office to finish the rest of his marking as the looming Monday made quick work of the remaining hours of Sunday. He sipped at his tea, a hand resting pleasantly against Bump – who had been rather tender with him as of late – as he graded, pushing through the growing migraine at the top of his skull.

Even though it was perhaps a bit unwise, Severus had left the door between his office and classroom open, as his rooms weren't exactly the first the students terrorized when they had the mind to. And whenever a particularly brave – or stupid, rather – Gryffindor took it upon themselves to try and make Severus look a fool, there was almost always a crying youth involved as Severus Snape was no fool. Because every year he was more than willing to make it clear that he was *not* to be trifled with – much to Albus's chagrin. But as long as the lesson didn't stick, he had no qualms teaching it over and over again. Severus would never admit it, but there was a slight enjoyment at being able to reduce an overly confident Gryffindor to

a blubbering mess with a mere sneer and some acidic words.

As such, he felt rather safe sitting alone in his office, with only flickering candlelight for company, in only shirtsleeves and trousers. The nib scratched softly against the hapless parchment, bleeding carmine ink. Not for the first time since the whole pregnancy thing, did he wish for a glass of blended malt if only for the sting of the alcohol to dull the monotony of grading. Putting his quill down, he pinched and rubbed at the back of his neck, staring distastefully at the remaining essays.

There was the almost unperceivable click of his classroom door shutting, and Severus turned his head toward the sound. The classroom just beyond his office door remained dark, motionless. But still, he sat there for a few moments, all his instincts narrowing as his mind pushed through a litany of possibilities.

Momentarily, he thought back to bygone school days, where the darkness could easily hide a malicious Black and Potter; he revisited wartimes where murky shadows held vengeful Death Eaters in blood-soaked robes. *Mere demons to be faced*, he thought as he threw his quill down and shoved his chair backwards, getting to his feet. A lifetime of sulking in shadows, fighting unimaginable devils, tearing apart evil from within had left him – perhaps a bit foolishly – numb, confident.

A wordless *nox*, and the office plunged into darkness. And while he knew the office, the classroom as well as he knew his own rooms – having stumbled them in the black around midnight, mind swamped with pain or drunkenness – he cast an illumination spell, the tip of his wand glowing faintly blue as his free hand rested possessively over Bump, fingers spread to cover as much as his distended stomach as possible.

He felt the baby kick particularly hard, cutting his inhale short as he approached the office door.

A cautious look around the classroom proved it to be empty, even as Severus remained near the door, all his senses straining as though searching for some idiotic student – or more likely, werewolf – under an invisibility cloak. He let the illumination spell

dwindle out, all the candles in his classroom roaring to life with a wave of wandless magic.

The glass urn on his desk was the first thing he saw – deep red in its color and shimmering softly. A tiny cardstock tag proclaimed Horklump juice, and Severus snorted. Of course, it would be Lupin, sneaking into his rooms sometime past curfew, to leave a fucking present. He let his hand run slowly over Bump, as though settling the baby underneath his thinly stretched skin. One by one the candles died out as he turned away.

"Fucking insufferable werewolf," Severus snarled, retreated into his office, the door slamming behind him.

19 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a mango

The only real indication of someone having been in his rooms , other than the sneaking suspicion he had, as though his atmosphere had been disturbed – when he returned from his weekly check-in with Poppy, wherein he had been told that Bump was the size of a mango – was the rather large cluster of dittanies bound with a silver bow. Severus glowered at the small green leaves, plucking the bow undone and selecting a stem for inspection. The waxy leaves certainly looked perfectly fresh, he still found himself frowning.

He had *rather* thought that Lupin would give up, as every day – every present received – Severus had made sure to completely ignore not only the gift but the gift-giver as well. He had thought that eventually the misguided lycanthrope would cease . . . whatever it was that he was trying to accomplish. And there was no mistaking that it was Lupin, even though fervent glances never seemed to linger overly long, as though the other seemed to still respect his wishes for space. If one could ignore the fact that the werewolf had taken to invading his space to leave tokens of appreciation, like flowers left outside his door.

Scowling, Severus replaced the single dittany with the others, setting it down with a sneer.

"He's running out of ideas for whatever the hell it is he's trying to convey," he told Bump sharply, cupping the underside of his stomach as though he could alleviate some of the weight by transferring it to his palm.

Of course, the choice of dittany blatantly gave it away that it was Lupin leaving him presents – as though there had been some question to it. No one else would have been dense enough to try and sway his mind with potion ingredients. Actually, no one else would have been dense enough to think to try and court him after he had made it crystal clear he wanted nothing to do with them.

No one but Lupin.

Dittany was an extremely useful ingredient for things such as Wolfsbane, a rather loudly proclaimed calling card. And Severus left it where he had found it – on his coffee table, next to his favorite copy of *Unusual Poisons*. Instead, he retreated into his bedroom and slowly changed out of his teaching robes and into his pajama bottoms. Earlier in the day he had thought perhaps he was actually hungry – though the hollowness of his stomach was better than the unbearable ache of insatiable hunger – but as the day had progressed, Severus had realized it was simply exhaustion, which was understandable.

Bump had taken to blessing him with strange dreams the last few days, waking him up often and keeping him awake until he thought his mind would go crazy with the tiredness.

He crawled into bed, resting on his side with a pillow between his knees. Severus kneaded his fingers into his skin, rubbing particularly hard against his hip, against the underside of his belly, up along his ribs. His breath puffed out of his nose in a sigh, as he tried to relax further into the mattress, into the nest of his bedclothes. His hand traveled down to his thigh, rubbing at the ache there as his toes pointed, straightening his leg blissfully, the motion pulling his spine straight as his knuckles dug into the tired muscles before his leg relaxed. His body slumped back into the relaxed curl around Bump.

Severus sighed again, rubbing his palm slowly over the soft skin of his stomach, feeling where his old scars had stretched with his abdomen, smoothing. His fingertips found the edges of his ribs, traced the shallow crevice of his hip, the taunt skin between belly and groin.

"What the fuck is he on about, hmm," he asked Bump, as though the baby – being half Lupin's – would know better than he about why the lycanthrope was acting so strangely. He lightened his touch until his fingertips made the barest of contact with his sensitive stomach, tracing slow patterns in a way that tended to lull Bump – and himself – into a light doze.

"I'm trying not to encourage him. Surely you know that." Severus sighed, letting his fingers wander slowly over the sharp edges of his ribs. "I was an obligation – I won't put you through that, Bump." His eyes drifted shut, and Severus allowed himself to focus on the feel of his fingers on his stomach, taking delight in the soft fluttering of movement under his skin as the baby adjusted.

"If he won't love you because you're worth loving, we don't need him then, do we," and suddenly, he found he wasn't exactly sure who the *you* referenced. Quickly, he shut off that train of thought, pressing his palm warmly to his side, letting his hand slide downward just enough to cup the swell of his stomach. He forced himself to drift.

In the days following, Severus found he was almost irrationally unwilling to enter his rooms. So instead, he took tea with Poppy in the Infirmary, rubbing his eyes as he waited to for the kettle to whistle.

"He's leaving me presents," he finally said, breathing out heavily through his nose.

Poppy gave him a curious look. "Really, presents?" She poured two cups of tea, and Severus watched as a stray peppermint leaf floated to the top of his cup. "Why do you sound so . . . perturbed by that."

"He shouldn't be. I made it rather clear that I don't want to pursue a relationship."

"Don't want to pursue one, or don't want to force him into it," Poppy asked over the rim of her cup, taking a sip even as Severus gave her a scathing look over the table. "Severus, I just . . . I don't see what's so wrong with him liking you."

Of course, he would have been able to offer up a million and one reasons why Lupin should never like him, why Severus should continue to just linger on the edges of society like some parasite, but instead he sipped at his tea – blatantly ignoring the question that Poppy had posed.

"He likes you, Severus. You're worth liking. You laid foundations for

a child to topple a despot; even if you can be a bit cruel, you've good intentions at heart. Mostly. And of all the people I can think of, you certainly deserve love . . ."

Again, he gave her a look – pieces clicking into place as she continued her train of thought. "He was always fairly hopeless at potions." The sentence lingered between them, and suddenly, Poppy looked a little uncomfortable. "Surely, you're not helping him in this unreasonable undertaking."

And suddenly, she couldn't meet his gaze.

Severus scoffed, shaking his head as he set his teacup down on the table between them. "I want to be angry with you. But honestly, Poppy – this is a certain trickery I figured would have come from Dumbledore, not you. I'm just . . . I don't know. I thought you were on *my* side." He stood abruptly, smoothing his thick robes down as though he could smooth every aspect of his shambled life back into place. "I think I shall retire for the evening."

"Severus," she started, getting to her feet as if to stop him, and he managed a sharp smile.

"Good night, Poppy."

In his rooms, he let the feeling of betrayal swell unbearably under Bump, until he smashed his favorite tumbler in the fireplace, followed by the teacup Poppy had gifted him with last Christmas. He watched the reflection of flames lick over the shards of ceramic and glass, breathing heavily as he tried to calm himself. "Just us I suppose," he told Bump, even as he felt his hormones roil just under his skin. And unable to let it die, he spat out into the quietness of the room, "Deserving of love, bah." Severus gritted his teeth, glaring unseeingly at a sharp corner of the fireplace.

"The world's gone mad," he muttered, letting his body collapse into his chair as though something had stolen his spine. Letting out a deep huff of a breath, Severus smiled ruefully across the room at nothing in particular. "Deserving of love, indeed."

He woke sometime later, the fireplace cold and filled with soot. A

glance at the clock told him to go ahead and start his day. A shower, a cup of tea, a spell later, Severus almost felt presentable. He taught his first class, Second Year Slytherins and Gryffindors, without incident. He let himself fall into the routine of it. Of course, his mind was already working toward the end of the day, to the beginning of the weekend – to spending countless hours in bed with his new book about dark spells.

As his final class ended, Severus stepped through his rooms. A quick glance around showed nothing out of the ordinary, but he could *feel* it. The sense of something having wedged itself under the edge of his comfort zone, knocking it all askew and leaving him off balance. Suspiciously, Severus looked around the sitting room as he charmed his robes open, leaving them over the back of the sofa. He slowly rolled his cuffs up, getting ready for an evening of potions prep. His dark gaze swiveled around the room, searching for something more substantial than a feeling as an indication of someone having been in his rooms.

Someone really meaning an insufferable werewolf named Remus Lupin.

Carefully, he stepped through his rooms, gaze sharp and all-seeing as he regarded each corner, each shelf, each piece of furniture. Severus frowned, looking overly hard for some kind of evidence that the lycanthrope had been in his rooms. Because no one else would be so bold, so fearless, so dense.

Sniffing in disdain, he pushed open his bedroom door. His gaze swept the stones, the thick rug, the large bed and matching furniture. Drawing closer, Severus smoothed the comforter at the foot of his bed, flattening wrinkles as though he could brush aside his paranoia. His gaze traveled up the comforter to the headboard, where he found the latest present.

A silver bundle of hair looking suspiciously like spilt moonlight sat on top of his pillow, tied up perfectly with a deep green – *Slytherin green*, he mused – bow. A lesser potions master would have mistaken the bundle as Granian hair, but he knew better. Drawing in a deep breath through his nose, Severus approached the head of his bed, letting his fingers skim the softness of his blanket as he

regarded the bundle of hair. His fingers traced a silken curl, pulling the strands straight before they slid free from his touch, recurling.

"Unicorn," he said aloud, his hand resting easily on the swell of Bump, the little imp twisting near his stomach, a hard push at his palm. "He's getting rather bold," Severus drawled, lips pursing as he plucked the bundle of hair from the dark grey pillowcase. "It's one thing to enter my office, my rooms uninvited, but my bed chambers? I should think not."

His lips twisted as his hand smoothed along his side, the swell of his stomach in thought. "Your father is getting out of hand."

20 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a banana

"Stop leaving me presents; you are not a bloody cat," he bit out, all anger and bitterness, wrapped up in seething attitude. Severus had drawn himself up to his full height in the middle of the staff lounge, with every intention of making a fool of Lupin. "Your poor, misguided thoughts of romance are unwelcome," Severus continued, arms crossing over his chest.

Curious hazel eyes peered up at him, blinking owlishly even as Lupin offered up a small smile. "Misguided," the lycanthrope repeated, an eyebrow lifting as his head tilted to the side.

"Severus, calm down," Minerva started in from across the table of Lupin, but Severus ignored her. In all honesty, he ignored the entire population of the lounge in favor of glaring down at Lupin. Otherwise, he would have to admit to the fact that Flitwick and Sprout were regarding him with befuddlement and that Minerva was rolling her eyes.

"Yes, misguided," he stressed, lips drawn up tight in a snarl, ignoring Minerva to glare at Lupin.

Lupin lifted his cup and took a sip of his tea before returning the cup to the table. "I merely – found a few things I thought you would find useful."

He scowled further, eyes narrowing. "You expect me to believe that drivel," he snarled.

"Did you throw them away, then," Lupin asked – voice lilting, somehow managing to convey smugness and worry all in one tone.

Severus opened his mouth, something terrible rattling free from that place just above his diaphragm, and Minerva practically jumped to her feet, as though she could know his words. And

perhaps she could.

"Severus," she snapped out loudly in the quietness of the room, hand grasping his arm just above his elbow. He cast her a look, even as the sharp, acidic words pooled in his mouth. "A walk, shall we. Perhaps to see the lovely fanged germaniums that Pomona has cultivated."

Minerva pulled him from the lounge, leading him slowly through the hall as she wound her arm through his. His anger cooled with each step placed between himself and Lupin. "Have you seen Poppy this week?"

"No," he admitted, knowing full well that Minerva already knew the answer to that question.

She tutted beside him, squeezing her arm around his as she leaned against him just enough to cast him off balance. "I'm sure she's very concerned about your health."

"Don't act as though you all haven't been talking about me," he snapped out, giving her a look. Which she countered with a wry grin.

"Oh, all right, your name has come up." Minerva gave him a look, free hand on her hip. "You're overreacting, Severus. Remus *likes* you. What's so wrong with that."

Again, he could think of a million and one reason why it was wrong, why Lupin shouldn't like him. Why the whole relationship idea should be discarded completely. Instead, Severus gave Minerva a look, an eyebrow lifting. "So, you and Poppy have been playing matchmaker, have you. Just as set as Albus on me having my very own Gryffindor."

Her face twisted. "Really, Severus!" She managed to sound a bit put-upon as she leaned away from him just enough to give him a shocked look, her tone exasperated as though she couldn't believe he had had the audacity to ask. "That's absurd."

"Lupin was always terrible at potions" he said resolutely, watching

as Minerva spluttered and hissed but said nothing to prove him incorrect. They came to a stop, staring out over battlements as the giant squid raised a suckered arm, reaching for the moon. As quickly as the arm appeared, it sunk beneath the waves of the lake.

"I just don't understand why it's so bad if he *does* like you, Severus," she finally said. Which was an admission of guilt if only because she was deflecting.

He sighed heavily through his nose, opening his mouth to retort – but she beat him to it, her hand reaching out to press softly against Bump. "Don't give me that nonsense about him doing it simply because of the baby. He's been after you for months, years even – much longer than he's known about Bump. Besides, Poppy and I just want you to be happy; of all of us, you're certainly worthy of it."

Minerva pulled him back inside, and he let her lead him toward the Infirmary, pursing his lips in almost disgust. Because the last thing he wanted – other than to see Poppy – was to admit maybe she was correct in her thinking.

"Poppy! I've brought Severus," Minerva called out, ushering him toward the back room, as though it was all really just a social visit and not some attempt to balm over the hurts between them.

He was already charming his robes open, leaving them over the back of a chair as usual, undoing his shirt buttons, running his palms along Bump without being asked. Severus barely looked up, barely registered as Minerva's hands cupped Bump, the older witch leaning in to croon softly at his distended belly as Poppy finally joined them in the back room. The two shared a brief kiss in greeting before Poppy spoke.

"Hello, love. Severus." Her tone soft and cold, like she was biting back her hurt in favor of Severus, which was a possibility. She had done that often enough during the wars, during the supposed peace between them – while bandaging him up and stitching him back together.

"Poppy," he said flatly, pushing himself back onto the bed and doggedly ignoring the tensions still lingering between them. Severus

could see it, the moment her anger smoothed out at the edges, taking in the swell of Bump like a salve to the soul. Quietly, her hands landed on his skin, soothing away his aches like she had always done – a mother's touch to a child who too often had been rejected, left unwanted.

"Twenty weeks; you're halfway through the pregnancy," she told him softly, her fingers smoothing along Bump before prodding, questing against his sides. "The dear love is the size of a banana," Poppy said, her thumbs rubbing over his organs, pushed out of place by Bump's continued growth. "Any pain or anything," she finally asked, giving him a look – as if she was able to discern truth from lie. Which, if he were honest, she was better than most.

"Nothing new," Severus responded, rubbing his hand along the left-side swell of Bump, where the little imp liked to kick his kidney. She gave him a hard, scrutinizing look before nodding – which he took as a release of his person.

It hadn't been a proper visit but had done the job it was meant to do. It had soothed like a balm, had smoothed away tensions. It had breathed forgiveness into the air, had reminded him that for all their trickery – Poppy and Minerva only wanted what was best for him. Severus heaved a sigh, hating that he'd never been good at being soft and vulnerable; hating that Poppy would likely always be turned away if she tried too hard to help.

As he dressed to leave, the notion of apologizing came to mind, but disappeared as a fleeting fancy. It lingered there between them, thought and known by both but unspoken as he retired for the evening.

In the morning, in the Great Hall – directly where he *always* sat – he found a flower, resting gently on his place setting. His lips drew down in a scowl – rarely did he take breakfast in the hall, so he was left to wonder how many other days had a flower rested for him on his plate, waiting hopefully for him to notice it. Severus doggedly ignored Lupin, the curious gazes of some of his fellow professors, and the shock of the students as he sat down, regarding the heather grey blooms dotted and laced with lavender. He picked the bloom up, staring intensely at the stem of foxglove, as though he could set

it alight with a look alone.

There was irony in Lupin's choice, of course. Highly poisonous, the bloom could kill if ingested, but it was rather useful for potions making – as well as pretty, he was begrudged to admit. He didn't think overly long at what the werewolf was implying. Instead, he merely placed it to the side of his plate and reached for the tea.

Somehow, he managed to ignore all the peculiar looks that filtered across the Hall in his direction. If he acknowledged those looks, he'd have to acknowledge the whole situation – which was unfavorable. So instead, he sipped his tea and pretended to listen to Minerva comment on the Gryffindor quidditch team – counting moments until his first opportunity of escape.

Once his appearance had lasted long enough, Severus stood – making sure to collect the flower, after all it was a perfectly good ingredient – and left the hall. He pretended not to notice the door opening behind him, chasing his footfalls.

"Severus," Lupin called, tone breathless as though him merely taking the flower was an acceptance of Lupin's misguided advances.

"I take it you left this flower for me," he responded sharply, turning to regard the werewolf.

"That's what you do when you're courting someone," Lupin said, tone confused.

"You're aware this flower is highly poisonous, correct? Trying to kill my love before you earn it," Severus sneered, crossing his arms over his chest.

"I knew there was a reason it reminded me of you – dangerous *and* appealing," the lycanthrope quipped, practically purring as he stepped closer, their robes brushing.

Drawing in a deep breath through his nose, Severus pinched the bridge to stave off the mounting headache Lupin was managing to cause. "I must insist that you stop this foolishness at once. We are *not* courting."

"Well . . . what if I want to court you," the lycanthrope continued, stepping forward boldly, neatly into his personal space, nearly pressing him back into a wall.

"Fuck is more like," he ground out, eyes narrowing.

Lupin gave him a bright smile, "That would be a lovely perk, yes. But courting isn't a means to an end if all we're planning on doing is fucking," accompanied by a rather wolfish grin. "Would you rather I call it dating? That I want to date you?"

Severus snorted, rolling his eyes at the term. "It doesn't matter what you call it, Lupin," he sneered. "It isn't happening."

A hand pressed flat against the wall beside his head as the werewolf leaned in, nearly touching him but not quite. Severus drew in a small breath, determined not to shrink away from the all-too-muchness of Lupin's body heat, the conflict of hazy feelings humming at the back of his mind as though Lupin found the whole situation to be arousing, even if it wasn't going as he had planned. Soft hazel eyes regarded him as the werewolf's lips downturned in an almost pout.

"It wouldn't be bad, Severus. Dating me, I mean."

"We're not dating," he ground out.

And something cruel rattled free from the creases of his mind, as though the lycanthrope was making a point about dating Severus. Which was why, as a rule, he didn't date – meaningless fucks in a dark room, sure; never dating though, because it always occurred to him that it might be considered bad to date a one Severus Snape. So, to reiterate his cruelly terrible point, Severus let himself lean into Lupin's space, their chests touching. He could hear the sharp, deep inhale of the werewolf and was again struck by the thought of Lupin smelling him. Severus toyed with the idea of brushing his lips along the other's jaw but disregarded it as though it might give too much away.

"However; I'm sure you're aware of a particular Muggle arrangement that includes those physical perks, without the dating,"

Severus continued, letting his tone dip down into something silky. If Lupin had had wolf ears, they would have pricked forward in interest, he was certain.

"Ah." There was a soft fluster to Lupin's tone, as the werewolf moved his face a little closer, lulled into hopefulness by the silky purr of Severus's tone, the closeness of their bodies. "Yes, I do – Sirius was rather fond of that arrangement . . ."

Severus fought the urge to let his face pull downward in disdain at the mention of Black.

"What a shame we're not friends, and therefore no such arrangement will occur. Which would be far more favorable to actually dating you, Lupin," he said, voice whisper-soft in a tone meant only for use inside the bedroom. "We're not, nor will we ever, date." He pushed against the werewolf's chest, consequently crushing the stem of foxglove against Lupin's form. Who was staring at him dumbly as though still trying to understand how exactly everything had gone so wrong so quickly, allowing himself to be moved backwards.

"Move on, Lupin," Severus bit out, letting the flower tumble to the stones between them before striding briskly for the Dungeons.

In his rooms, Severus paced, anxious. A knock clicked against his door, and upon further inspection, he found Minerva outside his rooms, knuckles tapping softly. Heaving a sigh – knowing the older professor would stay until he answered – Severus tugged the door open, stepping back so she could enter.

"Really, Severus. Don't you think you're being overly dramatic," were the first words out of her mouth as she stepped past him, heading immediately for the sitting room. "You practically left him an emotional mess outside the Hall."

Which earned her a glare – that she promptly ignored.

"Minerva, your lot are foolhardy and dense. I will *not* be made some twisted obligation to Lupin," Severus bit out, hands on hips – which only managed to make the swell of Bump more noticeable. She gave

him a look as she folded herself onto the sofa, breathing out a long sigh through her nose as though he was a particularly slow child.

"You know," she started, smoothing the wrinkles over her lap. "I chased Poppy for *years* without so much as a date – back when we were both young, had just started at Hogwarts."

And Severus was familiar with the story – had heard it from Poppy a handful of times as she mindlessly babbled while tending to his wounds after particularly bad meetings. "I believe she called it *hounded* but yes, I know. Until finally you wore her resolve down. But a Slytherin is a bit different from a Hufflepuff, Minerva," he reminded her with a sharp look. Which earned him an eyeroll.

"Yes Severus, I am aware. That difference – namely being extraordinarily kind and giving – is what got me that date in the first place, I'm sure. Too big of a heart to keep on breaking mine." He snorted in amusement, letting himself fold into the chair by the fireplace, suddenly exhausted. "My point is that Remus has been chasing you for years. In his own way."

Severus offered up a soft, noncommittal noise low in his throat, and Minerva sighed again.

"When you were boys, I encouraged him to ask you for help with Potions." A smile split across her lips. "Merlin, he spluttered and blushed and mumbled something about House differences – and oh, to be young and in love again." She gave him a twinkling, misty-eyed look.

And he gave her a scoff for her troubles. "That hardy equates to love, Minerva."

"You're right Severus – but he did ask you. Admittedly you and his friends . . . bit of a rock and a hard place, especially for a young werewolf, wouldn't you say. And when Remus returned to teach the first time – offered you an olive branch time and time again, no matter how much you scoffed and seethed. He even played nursemaid to you in wartime."

He crossed his arms over his chest, glaring at her. "If there is a *point*

here, please get to it quickly," Severus bit out, glowering as Minerva stirred old memories.

"Point is," she said, getting to her feet, "years of chasing you won't deter him. And you've already worn down enough to take him to bed – doesn't matter that you're all poisonous spines and sharp teeth *now*; he's had you soft and vulnerable and intimate. It'll be enough to fuel him for a century, Severus. After all, it's rare that a Gryffindor does not get what they want."

That statement stirred something low in his guts, something that tried to be warm and fuzzy but really just came out feeling like indigestion.

"Minerva . . ." he started but fell silent at how soft and hurt his voice sounded. But there were words wrapped up in tone, words she knew from fifteen years teaching together.

The older professor gave him a soft smile as she smoothed down her robes and sighed. "I know Severus; I'm leaving. I just . . . don't discount Remus just yet. He cares for you."

There was the soft click of his doors closing behind her, leaving him in stirred up emotions made worse by the pregnancy. His hand smoothed over Bump as he mulled over what she had said.

21 Weeks - Your baby is the size of an endive

His week began with a potion – specifically, *the* potion – and Minerva's words still burned fresh in his mind. But he couldn't – *wouldn't* – think about what she had said, and instead he focused on the Wolfsbane. And Severus mentally ran through the steps a dozen times – first as he added ingredients, then as he stirred, and finally as he waited. His hand rested along the curve of Bump, counting along with the magicked timer.

The Winter Solstice had rendered the castle empty, sending the majority of the students home for the holidays.

And he had never been so grateful, as it meant he could take to stalking the hallways without the burdensome teaching robes, cuffs rolled up to just below his elbows. While the heavy woolen garment had its uses, it was beginning to become a bit too stifling about his midriff. Not that the fabric was tight *exactly*, but rather it didn't drape quite as loosely, or dramatically, as Severus would have liked.

As he ladled the potion into its chalice, Severus sighed through his nose deeply. He glanced down at Bump, who was rather apparent where it jutted from his lean frame, as though someone had simply stuffed a balloon under his shirt.

"You're an awful big burden for someone your size," he growled, rubbing the upward curve as nausea swelled under his ribs. Between the nausea and the heartburn, he had found himself to be in a rather permanent state of indigestion. Even bland foods seemed to irritate Bump and leave him in abdominal distress until he retched.

Snorting, Severus cast the simple concealment spell that smoothed out his edges unless one looked *just* so, catching the warbled edge of magic tracing his distended stomach, and picked up the chalice.

Even without the ominous robes, he managed to scowl deeply enough that any student or professor he ran across on his walk upward was appropriately cowed. He knocked on Lupin's door, glaring at a gaggle of Second Year girls in scarlet and gold, who were eying him in terrified amazement. The door opened whisper-soft, and Severus turned his attention to the Gryffindor he had come to see.

"Severus," Lupin remarked softly in surprise, gaze – as it always did – running the length of his frame whenever the lycanthrope found him without his robes. Brows furrowed; Lupin regarded him curiously. "Was I . . . supposed to come to the Dungeons for my potion before lunch? I don't recall you saying."

"Common decorum says you invite me in," he bit out haughtily, ignoring the question.

"I wasn't aware you needed an invitation. I thought that was only for vampires." The corners of Lupin's lips curved upward in a leer, and Severus scowled.

"If you make *any* insinuation about me biting, I will hex you every day until Christmas." There was laughter in those golden hazel eyes. "Now. Invite me in."

"Please, dear – won't you come in," Lupin teased, stepping back into his rooms even as mirth glittered in his eyes, creasing his lips.

Sweeping into the small sitting room, Severus suddenly wished he had his robes to bundle about his frame. Instead, he thrust the silver chalice into the werewolf's hands.

"No, I did not indicate when you were to come to the Dungeons for your potion. However, I'm growing weary of you sulking into my rooms late at night, and the things the students are assuming because of such actions."

"I don't sulk," Lupin pouted, before upturning the goblet with a grimace. "If anything, I prowl."

"I'm not prey, Lupin. This isn't a hunt." He rubbed his temple,

sighing heavily as uneasy silence filled the room about them.

"How's er . . . things," the lycanthrope finally said, motioning toward Severus's abdomen. "Concealment spell, I'm sure . . .?" Of course, his tone lilted upward in question, and Severus scowled rather formidably at the notion that Lupin thought perhaps he had done something to Bump.

"Are you insinuating something, Lupin. Asking, perhaps, in a roundabout way if I've done something unsavory."

Confusion dug itself into every feature of Lupin's face. "What? No!" Hands gestured wildly as Lupin fought to backtrack. "Just – I mean last time you were . . . and now you're . . ."

"Having trouble with the English language again, I see." Severus raised a dark brow, giving Lupin a look. "It's rather rude of you to comment on my size anyway."

"I was just . . ." but Severus had had enough of the werewolf's blathering and raised a hand, effectively silencing the other – if only to save Lupin some embarrassment and himself some time.

"I'll bring your potion by tomorrow afternoon," he bit out sharply, brushing past the werewolf and heading for the door.

"Severus," Lupin finally managed, but Severus merely let the door shut behind him.

He allowed himself to retire to his rooms for the remainder of the evening, the concealment spell falling away with a wave of his hand.

With no classes to teach that afternoon and no desire to attempt eating, Severus merely stripped down in his bathroom and drew a hot bath – ignoring the mirror as it crooned sexual comments.

"You look so much better with some meat on your bones; so lovely," the enchanted glass purred, its tone low and silky. Appreciative. But it managed to stir that feeling of much too . . . thereness – as his sharp edges had begun to soften, as he was made vulnerable to the world. Huffing out a heavy sigh, Severus rolled his eyes and let

himself sink into the water, collecting almost scalding droplets on his fingertips and letting them cascade over the island that Bump made.

"Surely, not even he's stupid enough to think I would do something to you," Severus finally said, Lupin's implied question having affected him more than he would have liked, digging sharply at the soft walls of his chest. Severus ran damp palms over Bump, letting his head loll back against the edge of the tub, deep in thought.

He forwent dinner in the Great Hall, and breakfast – deciding to remain in his chambers, relaxing and pampering Bump with yet another hot bath and a long massage with cocoa butter. He dozed on and off, lulled by the soft scent of coconut. Severus finally managed to rouse himself for lunch and told himself he should make an appearance in the hall, or risk having someone show up at his rooms. Rolling out of bed, Severus went about making himself presentable, smoothing his hair and righting his clothes.

The concealment spell was the last thing he did before leaving his rooms.

In the Great Hall, he found yet another flower – an angel's trumpet this time – and Severus raised his eyebrows in curiosity. Yet another pretty but poisonous flower. He settled himself into his seat at the head table, moved the flower, and reached for the tea.

"So, Remus is courting you is he," Sybill asked, voice soft and curious, as he filled his cup.

"He's certainly trying," Severus muttered darkly, giving her a look which she returned, blinking owlishly from behind her too-large glasses.

"Shall I read your tea leaves, Severus? Tell you what to expect should you allow it?"

Not for the first time, did Severus curse the fact that Trelawney wasn't swayed by his acidic personality, as he found her field of Divinations to be utterly pointless and would have thought so even if she had had an ounce of her great-great-grandmother's ability. As

it was, Sybill was either too stupid or perhaps too blind to see how much disdain Severus held for Divinations, or she wouldn't have tried overly hard to be friendly.

"I should think not, Sybill." He took a sip of his tea, ladling a small bowl of broth – made specifically for him and his fragile stomach – as Severus gave her a look. He stirred a spoon through the almost clear liquid. "I'm merely using it as a means to an end to receive lovely potion ingredients."

"I've had a premonition, Severus." The look she gave him, from behind too big of glasses, was dreamy as though she couldn't contain herself at what she had Seen.

He barely contained his snort, even as Minerva gave him a scathing look and smiled around him at Trelawney. "He would love to hear it, Sybill. Please share."

Rolling his eyes, Severus sipped a spoonful of broth and gave Minerva a look. In all honesty, Severus would wager that the *premonition* was about as vague and accurate as a Muggle horoscope, but Minerva had opened the door.

"I See that Remus will bring you great happiness, should you allow him into your life."

That time, he was unable to keep the snort in. *Just as vague as I expected*, he thought to himself taking another sip of soup. As it stood, practically anything that Lupin did that resulted in his happiness would prove Trelawney correct, thus verifying her abilities – and as such, Severus took it all with a grain of salt.

"How quaint," he drawled, pursing his lips together tightly. "Be sure to share your vision with him. If he thinks there's a chance, perhaps he'll spend more on my ingredients."

"Really, Severus," Minerva bit out, giving him a sharp grimace as though she was really surprised.

"Pass it along that I'll be in his rooms in three hours with the potion, would you," Severus said, getting to his feet. He picked up the stem

of angel's trumpet and gave Minerva a look.

She gave a very put-upon sigh. "Fine. I'll tell him."

So, Severus took his leave of the Great Hall and focused overly much on brewing the potion. He shaved and chopped ingredients, letting himself be lulled into the repetitive motion, repeating steps in his head as he performed them. The baby churned in his torso, earning it a hard press of a palm. It mirrored the pressure from inside his body. "If you'd stop being a brat, I would appreciate it. I'm trying to brew," he muttered, glaring downward.

It seemed to take forever and no time at all to finish the Wolfsbane potion once Bump settled down. And all too quickly he found himself outside Lupin's doors, knocking sharply. The door opened, and a rather meek looking Lupin stepped back to let him enter. Severus handed the goblet over, eyebrows lifted barely in request.

"Severus," the werewolf said, holding onto the chalice with tight fingers. "I . . . didn't mean to imply anything yesterday. I was merely taken aback by your state."

He sighed heavily through his nose, resting his hand along his side. "Drink your potion, Lupin."

"I never meant to imply you might do . . . something to the baby."

"You mean *abort* it," he said drily. Lupin flinched backwards, his features pulling downward before he turned his attention to the goblet, gulping at the viscous liquid thickly and thrusting the empty cup towards him.

With no other reason for him to be there, Severus held the chalice with numb fingers and offered up a wry smile. "Did you know . . . I'm halfway through my pregnancy. And that the baby is the size of an endive." The words fell past his numbed lips, with no real understanding of why he was even bothering to tell Lupin that information. But to him – in some sort of way – the amount of time, the pain he had born showed a willingness to see it through.

Lupin reached for him. "Severus . . ."

"Point is Lupin, I've come a fairly long way to just give up on the baby for some tightness in my clothes." He turned toward the door, his hand pressing against the soft spot above his hip. "I'll send a house elf with your potion the rest of the week."

"Severus," the lycanthrope tried again, but Severus saw himself out the door.

In his chambers, as the concealment spell fell away, his hands smoothed slowly up Bump before he changed into his pajama bottoms and climbed into bed. Words filled his mouth, as though he needed to explain things away to the baby growing in his guts, but he simply swallowed them down. Forcing his eyes shut, he ran his palms and fingertips along Bump until he dozed off.

Bundled up in his rooms, Severus sent Lupin's potions to him via house elf, and he tried not to think overly much of how Lupin's assumption bothered him. Instead he dragged himself out of bed only to brew the wolfsbane potion and then promptly dragged himself back to bed. The space behind his ribs felt pitifully empty as he laid there in his nest of bedclothes, getting sharper as the hours passed. And at the end of the week, when Severus realized he had been laid up in bed, uncaring of anything beyond his bed and brewing the damned potion, he flinched.

His arms quivered pitifully as he propelled himself out of bed and into the bathroom, hastily undressing.

"Oh love, are you all right," the mirror asked, and he ignored it, heading for the shower.

Brilliantly hot water rained down against his skin, choking a sigh of relief from Severus's lungs. He rested against the wall, letting the water course along his frame, soothing deep-seated aches in his bones while choking him, making it almost impossible for him to draw in a deep breath. Feeling lightheaded, Severus shut off the water and toweled himself off quickly, pulling on the sleep pants hastily. There was a sudden imbalance of equilibrium in his mind, making him feel empty and heavy all at once.

Severus felt himself tipping, his hand reaching out for the sink to

steady himself even as his entire weight toppled. A bite of pain at his wrist from where the sink yanked it, the sharp jar of his head as his body crumpled to the ground, the taste of blood in his mouth. He tried to get to his feet but found himself overly weak. Bump churned in his guts almost angrily, and Severus let himself slump against the ground, his vision greying. *A rest would be fine*, he thought.

"Really Severus," Poppy was saying faintly from somewhere above him. He groaned, tried to stir. Hands held him still, smoothed along the aches that had burrowed down into his bones. "You've taken quite the spill – why didn't you tell me you were having issues with lightheadedness."

Severus groaned, trying to roll onto his side. When he finally succeeded, he coughed up foamy bile, spitting it out onto the stones beneath him. He felt fingers brushing his hair back from his face.

"You poor dear."

"Poppy," he finally choked out, coughing pitifully as he struggled onto his hands and knees, peering blearily up at her.

"You missed your visit," she chided softly, helping him to his feet – bearing most of his weight as she steered him toward bed.

"Dying," he gasped out, clutching at her as she led him to his bed.

"Well I certainly think you've a concussion, at the very least – but dying might be a bit of an overstatement. Hit anything on your way down?" Her tone lilted in his ears, soft and curiously blank in a way he remembered from all the times before – when neither of them was willing to breathe the seriousness of the situation into existence.

Vaguely, Severus remembered his skull rebounded off the unforgiving stones of the dungeon floor. "The floor," he muttered as he took stock of all the hurts in his bones. He let Poppy usher him into bed, making over him softly.

"You're lucky I found you, love," she muttered, tucking him in,

smoothing his hair.

"Last time, I nearly drowned," he murmured, feeling more exhausted than he had since the whole pregnancy began. Severus sighed, slumping back into the bed bonelessly.

"Not this time, my dear," Poppy said softly, and he let himself succumb to the exhaustion loitering behind his eyelids. He focused on the soft hum caught in her throat, her fingers in his hair in some vaguely comforting motion.

"Please don't tell Albus," he requested as his head sunk into his pillows.

22 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a coconut

"Have you been moisturizing," Poppy asked softly, tracing a myriad of new stretchmarks lacing his skin.

"I have, and soaks in the tub. I think Bump is merely growing too quickly for me to have any relief," he said, rubbing palms along the naked swell of his stomach, carefully avoiding the protrusion of his belly button – which was something he still hadn't grown accustom to.

Poppy pressed her hand rather heavily against his stomach, and Severus could feel as Bump pushed back, a tiny foot or hand meeting Poppy's through the thin barrier of his abdominal wall. Her eyes watered, her thumb smoothing soft circles against his skin.

"The dear love," she whispered, giving him a tender look that managed to snatch the breath out of his chest. "Surely you're not irritated over the marks, not when Bump is so lovely."

Severus snorted, rolling his eyes. "Lovely. A few soft touches do not make up for making me collapse last week, or for trying its damnedest to starve me."

She tutted and pushed against his stomach again, but Bump was silent in its nest of his guts.

"So, it's not all the time that Bump responds?"

"No. And sometimes the little devil kicks hard enough to keep me up all night. Not always a gentle soul." He didn't think Poppy needed to know about the times Bump had kicked his kidneys hard enough that he had pissed blood, or when it had pushed against his ribs hard enough to make them pop. Last week had worried her enough, and it had taken a lot of cajoling to get her to promise to not tell Dumbledore. So, he kept quiet about things that might

make her rethink her decision to keep his secrets.

Grimacing, he smoothed his hand along his stomach. "Back to the marks. I've been using cocoa butter and some betony and honey to encourage fading. I don't mind that they're there – I simply don't want them to be . . . vibrant."

She traced a particularly pink mark. "I think Muggles use Vitamin E and abrasive scrubs to encourage the fading. Maybe ground coffee beans or salt granules?"

He made a noncommittal noise in the back of his throat, pushing himself into a seated position. He paused, letting the blood flow circulate through his body before attempting to get to his feet. Severus shrugged on his shirt and began doing up the buttons. There was a brief moment as they both fell silent, that he thought either of them would apologize. The fiasco from last week had smoothed tensions, made it clear that Poppy wasn't terribly upset, and that Severus had been forgiven any indiscretions.

"Any . . . issues? Your head okay? Your wrist," she finally asked, giving him a look. "That bruise on your ribs?"

"Some headaches still; wrist is still sore but not swollen. Bruising is going down," Severus informed her, buttoning up his shirt. He drew in a deep breath. "Feet are swollen; fingers too. My hormones are a fucking mess. I can't sleep; we're back to the not-eating state of things. But we've made it another week, so I think we're surviving, aren't we Bump?" He ran a hand over the swell of his stomach, fabric pulled tight against his stomach.

"So, no real lingering effects of the fall then?" Poppy touched just over his ear curiously as if worrying over his mental state – as if the fall had perhaps rattled something free from the wall of his skull.

"Not really. Just the now-usual aches associated with Bump," he said, shaking his head in mock irritation. She tutted playfully.

"The baby's the size of a coconut now, you know," Poppy finally said, giving him a soft smile.

"If only my body reflected that, instead of a damn beach ball," Severus ground out, casting the concealment spell quickly, smoothing his hands along his sides to rid his clothing of wrinkles. His hand caught and rubbed his hand along his left side under his ribs, as though he could ease the deep-seated ache there from where Bump liked to kick his kidney and liver.

"I think you look lovely; you're positively glowing," Poppy told him lovingly. "Even with your belly hidden, there's something different about you."

Severus ran his fingers through his hair, sighing heavily. Lupin's almost accusation barbed at the tip of his tongue, even though he had tried to forget it. Finally, he gave Poppy an almost pained look.

"Lupin had the audacity to think I had perhaps done something to Bump. Having gone from swollen to lean in the course of weeks, I suppose." He rolled his eyes, snorting. "Can't exactly run about the fucking castle pregnantly bloated, can I."

Poppy gave him a look, cautiously serious in its intensity. "Surely Remus didn't . . . mean it like that." Even though she had suggested the same thing in the beginning, back *before* the baby had grown and developed and become its own thing. Because there was something safe about mentioning he flush a bundle of cells away, and something unseemly about washing away half a pregnancy.

He gave her a deadpan look, edges of his lips pulled downward. "He *asked* if I was using a concealment spell. That doesn't exactly exude confident in me."

"Those boys, as a whole, were always rather dense, Severus," Poppy said drily, her lips twisting at the corners. Near the door, Severus gave a snort of amusement. Because while Black and Potter had been malicious in their thinking, they had never been particularly smart when it came to pranks. Not to mention Pettigrew would have needed instructions to make his way out a paper sack. And, well – Lupin had been naively stupid.

"Yes, well . . ." Severus started, letting the words still on his lips and instead headed out the door.

Severus made his way downward from the Infirmary, heading for the Dungeons – drawing up short at the sight of Lupin standing just outside his doors. Those curious golden hazel eyes regarded him.

"Can we . . . go inside and talk?"

Crossing his arms over him chest, Severus drew himself up to his full height, glowering down at the lycanthrope. "I'd rather we didn't, actually."

Fingers curled around his forearm, an entreaty to a kinder nature he didn't possess, as a warm weight nearly loomed over him as though Lupin could convince him otherwise, pressing him back into his doors. Severus closed his eyes, trying to distance himself from the situation as his hormones danced wildly against his skin. He drew a deep breath in through his nose.

"Please?"

Severus was able to ignore that soft tone and the undercurrents it swirled to life in his libido far easier than the clearing of a throat and a curious "Professor Snape?"

He nearly flushed, eyes snapping open as both their attentions were pulled to the wayside by a young man in silver and green, looking between them curiously. Which he had every right to do – seeing as Lupin was still looming over him, practically pressing him against his chamber doors in a rather suggestive fashion – in the Dungeons' main corridor, no less.

"Ah, Mister Ainsley," Severus managed, pushing Lupin back, as he regarded the prefect almost warmly. "Decided to stay at the castle for the break after all," he asked, remembering vaguely how the dark-headed boy had suffered an internal dilemma over whether to remain and study or return home for the holidays.

"Yes, Sir." The quiet that settled was suddenly choking, as the boy's gaze darted between them curiously. Severus fought the urge to push Lupin back again. "Is everything . . . all right, Sir?"

Lupin rubbed his neck sheepishly, finally withdrawing enough to

give an almost warm smile toward the boy, who was not swayed. "Ah yes. Professor Snape here and I were just discussing the medicinal properties of doxy venom."

Severus wasn't blind to the look of mild disregard Ainsley gave Lupin, though the boy was too polite to comment on the fact that doxy venom was highly toxic and fatal if a bite were left untreated. The Fifth Year's gaze once again settled on his, questioning his Head of House silently. Drawing in a deep breath, he nodded.

"Yes, and the overall usefulness of maintaining a cupboard of bezoars on the off chance one doesn't have access to the Antidote for Uncommon Poisons handy," he lied through his teeth, effortlessly covering Lupin's inability to come up with a reasonable farce.

A moment passed, and he held the boy's gaze – who finally nodded, offering up a small smile before disappearing toward the main staircase. Severus rubbed his forehead roughly.

"Really? Doxy venom," he ground out, shaking his head incredulously and pushing at Lupin's chest. Which turned into more of his hands . . . pressing against Lupin's chest, the heat and sturdiness sticking his palms in place over the heavy thump of the werewolf's heart. "Couldn't have thought of anything else," he breathed out, all bite suddenly gone as those hormones stirred murkily beneath his skin.

"You managed well enough." A hand rested flat against the wall beside his head. Lupin was grinning playfully down at him, as though the whole situation was a joke.

"I've had practice," Severus hissed, eyes narrowing. "And had I *not* saved your sorry arse lie, my prefect would have left here with a delightful story of their Head of House being rather amorously accosted against his doors, you prat!"

"Amorously accosted," Lupin echoed, giving him a look – which caused Severus to bristle, because as it was it was also doing some pretty complicated things to those fucking hormones.

"Don't think about it," he muttered, trying to give the lycanthrope his most formidable glare – which admittedly probably wasn't as dark as he would have liked, as his libido kicked up a fuss. Not that it mattered overly much as Lupin's head tipped down slow enough that he could of stopped it if he wanted but then his mouth was slotted to Severus's, fingers tangling in his hair as the werewolf stepped impossibly closer, body practically forming around Bump like a heated blanket.

It would be easy, he thought as the notion of charming his doors open and pulling them both inside surfaced sharply in his mind, swept under a hormonal haze of arousal. Made worse as a hand curled around his hip, Lupin pressing against him in the sort of way that bordered on deliciously. He made a small noise high in his chest, fingers curling in Lupin's shirt even as he frantically tried to piece together his sense of restraint and dignity. All of which was becoming exceedingly more difficult, especially as Lupin managed to worm a thigh between his legs, pressing the warm length of it excruciatingly against his erection.

Severus was suddenly well aware of the situation – namely that they were two adults, making out rather vigorously as he tried not to grind down on the thigh so lovingly provided for such reason. Which managed to bring him somewhat to his senses. Enough so that he shoved Lupin away with a withering glare.

Lupin's cheeks were flushed, lips nearly bruised. "That . . . ah – that was unexpected." The soft twitter of a laugh as the lycanthrope gave him a sheepish smile.

"Unexpected," he seethed, which was – as he found – nigh impossible when his pants fit rather too snugly. He drew in a deep breath, trying to slow the heavy pound of his heart against his ribs.

"I merely wanted to talk, Severus. Just – bugger all, does your attitude rile me up. I certainly didn't mean to . . ." and the words petered out.

"Amorously accost me," Severus offered up, working very hard to keep his tone as neutral as possible. He ran fingers through his hair, smoothing it back into place where Lupin's fingers had mussed it

up. Severus made a show of straightening clothes, trying to ignore his fingers shaking and the conflict of emotions in his chest, itching at the back of his skull – a combination of his and Lupin's.

"Perhaps you should leave," Severus finally said, charming his doors open.

"I think we should talk . . . now more than ever!"

He didn't bother to dignify that with a response, simply slamming the door shut in Lupin's face. With a groan Severus threw himself down on the bed and yanked a pillow tight against his face.

Against his better judgement, Severus took dinner in the Great Hall, picking lackluster at his food while his tea cool to a bearable temperature. He glanced at the single table in the hall, filled with roughly thirty students from all four Houses. Ainsley gave him a soft smile, and Severus nodded, letting his attention be pulled to Minerva as the older witch leaned into his space.

"Remus looks as though he's had a good afternoon," she muttered, her tone lilting upward suggestively.

"With his hand perhaps," Severus bit out, lifting his teacup and sipping at the still hot liquid. He had found chamomile to be more palatable when it verily scalded his throat on its way down.

"He'd rather it be yours, I'm sure." Her eyebrows lifted as she gave him a pointed look. Severus took a sip of tea, ignoring her until she spoke again. "Do keep in mind that the portraits are wont to gossip – especially over something as juicy as a certain Slytherin being ardently *mauled*." And he nearly choked on his tea, turning to glare at her as she smiled.

"I think I shall retire for the evening," he ground out, getting to his feet as though Minerva had managed to offend the lingering shambles of his dignity after the afternoon he'd had.

"Yours or a certain Gryffindor's," she murmured from around the rim of her teacup, eyes glittering with mirth as he cleared his throat.

"You've been spending too much time with that duffer," Severus finally ground out, before taking his leave.

He made it precisely halfway to the doors before Albus called out to him – as though his day couldn't get any worse.

"Severus? Tea, perhaps this evening?" Spoken so that the order could be mistaken for a request, and he made a noncommittal noise in his throat, nodding jerkily before escaping the hall.

Counting the moment until he was to take his tea with the Headmaster, Severus ground a few of the moonstones the werewolf had left for him. It was therapeutic, feeling the stones give way under the pestle, crushing and grinding under his ministrations. He would take his time, calm himself thoroughly, and then refuse to let Albus Dumbledore get a rise out of him. After all, he had held court with a Dark Lord; tea with a meddlesome old coot should be nothing. A glance at the clock told him it was half past seven, and Severus decided it was as good a time as any to entertain the Headmaster. Forgoing the concealment spell, he simply Floo'ed into the other's office, where Dumbledore was currently fixing tea.

"Ah dear boy, so glad you could make it."

Severus made a noise low in his throat, settling himself into the chair opposite Dumbledore and resolutely looking anywhere but at those brightly twinkling eyes. His hand smoothed along Bump, thumb rubbing a little hard along the swell.

"You look lovely, dear," Albus finally said, leaning forward to pour him a cup of tea. "Positively glowing."

"Yes, so Poppy has said. Pregnancy – the all-natural remedy for better hair and skin," Severus remarked drily, sipping at his tea.

"How are you and Bump getting along? No untoward side effects?"

"Well, there hasn't been any permanent damage yet if that's what you're asking about." As if to prove him wrong, Bump shifted heavily in his innards, kicking roughly at his liver. Wincing, Severus pressed a hand to his side, fingers shaking and splayed as if to hold

the fetus still.

"Much more active, is it," Albus remarked, tone sounding suspiciously like he was trying to keep from smiling.

"Oh – only when I try to sleep, or breathe," he muttered darkly, rubbing at his side heavily and rather ineffectively. Bump pressed against his touch. A soft twitter of a laugh drew his attention to one of the portraits – Edessa Sakndenberg, if he remembered correctly – and she was positively blushing at him. Her fingers waggled at him in a wave, her lips upturned coyly.

Severus felt his stomach drop as the Bloody Baron slid into her frame, whispering in her ear – but he was sure she'd already heard all the gossip. As Minerva had mentioned, the portraits were terrible when it came to circulating stories. He scowled as the Baron wiggled eyebrows at him suggestively, as Edessa twittered behind a pale hand.

"Noticed them, have you? The Baron has been quite active today, recounting a passionate embrace he seemed to encounter down in the Dungeons . . ." Albus let the words peter off into the air between them.

"He's always been rather horrible at keeping his mouth shut," Severus growled, watching at the Bloody Baron slipped out of sight, leaving Edessa behind to eye him in what was clearly a sultry manner.

"So . . . have you and Remus decided to try, then?"

"No," he snapped out, letting his gaze harden before Severus gave the Headmaster a look. "Your damnable pet werewolf has a difficult time wrapping his head around the concept of personal space. Wherein he finds himself within *mine* quite often." He left out the fact that he couldn't always make up his mind *why* personal space was important.

Albus sipped his tea, carefully regarding the platter full of scones this time before selecting one. The elder took a slow bite, as though to savor the treat, before giving him a look. "Perhaps if you'd give

Remus a chance?"

Severus snorted derisively, rolling his eyes. "A chance?"

"Well, he has been sniffing around you since your Fifth Year."

"Trying to make bygones of the distasteful actions of his shitty friends does not constitute 'sniffing around,' as you so sweetly put it, Headmaster."

"Oh Severus," the elder wizard tutted, peering into his teacup as though in great thought. "Your name always comes up and has for quite some time. I know you and Remus haven't always gotten along, but you have to admit that was mostly because of Sirius and James. Remus has always been a rather sweet boy."

"Spineless is more like it," Severus ground out, sipping almost angrily at his tea.

"I'd use the word passive," Albus deferred, nibbling again at the end of his scone.

"If Black had succeeded, if Lupin had killed me . . . would you still be saying the same thing." Not for the first time did Severus feel anger roil in his guts – thoroughly jostling Bump into a state of nausea – at the memories. Black had received a slap on the wrist; he'd somehow managed to be indebted to Potter according to Dumbledore. There had seemed a blatant disregard for his – and admittedly Lupin's – wellbeing, which he sometimes found hard to overlook.

But the lycanthrope had been too *spineless* to forsake that cur Black; just as Severus had been too *weak* to turn his back to Albus when his skin had needed saving.

"That was a long time ago, my dear boy," Albus started, even though Severus had a point. The elder's tone was soft, a reminder that they had *all* made mistakes – not that it absolved either of them of their sins. Scowling, lost in the past, Severus ground his teeth before taking a heavy swallow of tea. The minty flavor seemingly clogged in his throat, and he could feel the nausea taking

a turn for the worst, saliva pooling in his mouth.

He hurriedly set his cup down. "Excuse me," he managed to choke out, stumbling into the fireplace and forcing the words out of his mouth – completely ignoring as the Headmaster called his name sharply as though in concern.

Severus barely had time to stagger to his bathroom, fingers clutching white-knuckled at the edges of the sink as he retched pitifully. Tea and stomach acid burned at his throat, as it made its way from deep inside his guts to splash forcefully against the white porcelain of the sink basin. His stomach clenched hard, Bump twisting heavily as his chest heaved, his body offering up little more than a dribble of bile. Severus coughed, turning the faucet on and rinsing his mouth out with water. Coughing more as the water seemed to encourage another round of cramping heaves.

"You poor dear," the mirror tutted, and he doggedly ignored it.

Clearing his throat, Severus spat into the sink – noting the bloody saliva where it slid viscously down the sink side, tinged pink with the lining of his throat or perhaps stomach. He drew in a shaky breath before snatching up his toothbrush and scouring every surface of his mouth.

Dragging himself off to bed, Severus merely collapsed – fully dressed – into the nest of bedclothes, squirming around just long enough to kick his shoes off.

He resolutely stayed in bed the next two days – only leaving the be sick or indulge himself in a scalding bath, pointedly ignoring the memories and emotions that stewed at the back of his head, churning in his chest like a tiller. When Severus finally made himself leave his rooms, he barely had the forethought to cast the concealment spell as he headed for the Great Hall. Exhausted, with a sharp emptiness lingering behind his ribs, the Great Hall was exactly the last place he wanted to be – but appearances needed to be made.

Severus pointedly ignored Minerva as he sat down at his place, almost glaring down at the small bouquet of asphodel resting at his

place setting, the plants' roots peeking out from under the almost golden cloth keeping them bundled.

The pointed blooms, white and striped with a rich amber, weren't poisonous but could wind up just as dangerous as the foxglove. If used correctly, the unassuming plant could be used to stopper death through the creation of the Draught of Living Death, casting the drinker into an indefinite sleep. Or be used for something cheerier such as the Wiggeweld Potion, to wake the drinker from their slumber. The plant also had a rather *romantic* connotation, if the Greeks were to be believed. The pretty white flowers were essentially synonymous with a particular fertility goddess of Spring and queen of the Underworld, found blooming rampantly in Paradise.

There was the over-eager itch of some cloying emotion at the back of his skull, managing to make Severus feel more agitated as he sniffed in disdain.

"At least they're useful," Minerva intoned next to him, buttering a piece of toast while regarding him with a sly smile, as though she had whispered to Lupin about them special for Severus.

Snorting, he moved the flowers with more care than perhaps he should have and reached for the toast. "Do be a dear and tell him that I'm running low on powdered silver, won't you," Severus drawled lowly, earning him a bright cackle of laughter from Minerva. While that particular myth about lycanthropy had been proven as false, it still felt almost therapeutic to request something that was once seen as hazardous to Lupin's health.

"Be sure to give me a shopping list, love, and I'll get your storeroom sorted for you," the older professor told him with a muted chuckle.

Severus snorted in amusement and reached for the tea. "Don't tempt me, because wouldn't that be a Slytherin move in the truest sense – exploiting a dense Gryffindor." Which earned him another cackle.

A bright wave of curiosity settled along his thoughts, and he imagined that Lupin had leaned forward just slightly to regard their end of the table. But Severus just ignored him.

23 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a grapefruit

Five months, Severus thought, mulling the words over in his head. *Size of a grapefruit.*

He sat at his desk, all essays needing to be marked pushed to the side and his book all about Bump resting in front of him. The sheets of parchment laid his pregnancy bare in neat, spidery script – all scientific with as little emotion as possible. It read more like a periodical than a diary of sorts, which Severus figured was probably for the best. Should anything happen to him, the journal would be found and read by at the very least Poppy, if not Lupin and Dumbledore as well.

And the last thing he wanted was to profess within its pages his very real fear of dying.

A particularly hard cramp tore at his stomach, clenching and relaxing and clenching again until his insides seized up. Poppy had called them Braxton Hicks contractions, but from what he had read, contractions abated eventually. And as it was, his stomach muscles felt like a blanket of lead around Bump, tightly squeezing and unforgivingly heavy. The cramps made it unbearable to do more than meekly sip at his tea – just the one cup a day now – and if he went over that, he found himself retching until it felt as though the lining of his stomach would tear free.

Rubbing his palm over his forehead, Severus let out a long sigh and picked up his quill, determined to write at least a few notes on the latest development, but instead . . . found himself sitting back in his chair.

Poppy had mentioned updating his will – a precaution, she had insisted as her hands had smoothed along his spasming abdomen. The note in his journal became instead a comment to where his will could be found, in the off chance the worst outcome came about.

Pulling a blank parchment in front of him, Severus stared down at the empty sheet, fingers tight to keep the shakes down.

Of course, he had written a will before – back in the shaky peace between the wars, when Voldemort had still been fresh and weak, when his loyalty had been questioned by both sides, when he had given all he had to ensure some idiotic boy with Lily's eyes and Potter's attitude had had a fighting chance.

But that was then – nearly twenty years ago. And admittedly, a lot had *changed* since then.

Heaving a sigh, he forced the nib to scratch across the blankness, scrawling deeply into the emptiness as he thought of what exactly to do with his meager possessions.

The money in his account would go to Bump, should the babe make it; custody to be given over to Poppy and Minerva – as the Wizarding World simply wouldn't allow the child to go to Lupin. If the babe didn't make it, the account was to be absorbed by Hogwarts to help pay for school supplies for less fortunate students. Spinner's End was to be sold, the money to be given away however the executor of his will saw fit. His books would remain at Hogwarts, tucked away inside the library; his notes, articles, and writings on potions making would be sent off to the guild where he had earned his title of Potions Master. His pregnancy journal would be finished with a thorough examination of his body after death and then published. His remains would be cremated, scattered over the aster-covered fields outside of Cokeworth.

Dropping the quill as if it burned, Severus leaned back, glowering at the single sheet lined brazenly with deep red ink – his entire life divided up, given away, forgotten in an instant. His hands fell to Bump, holding the swell of his stomach, feeling the gradual shift of the baby under his touch. Clearing his throat, he leant forward once more, picking the quill up and pressing the nib to the last few bare inches of parchment for one last decree, demand, request. He addressed Poppy specifically, telling her that in no uncertain terms was Lupin *ever* to know the dire odds that had been stacked against him, against Bump; the odds he had willingly accepted in the undertaking of his pregnancy.

Getting to his feet, Severus refused to acknowledge what that might have meant – his final wishes that Lupin's feelings be spared the heinous knowledge that the pregnancy had been almost fated to fail from the start. He folded the single sheet of parchment into thirds and tucked it away inside his copy of *Advanced Potion Making*.

Severus cleared his throat, as though the matter was done with, and tucked his journal into a desk drawer, heading for his rooms.

He charmed his buttons open, peeling fabric from his form to replace the woolen trousers with soft cotton sleep pants and promptly crawled into bed. Yet another hard cramp griped his stomach, his ribs and sides – making it nigh impossible to draw in a breath deep enough. Choking as his lungs drew up pitifully short, Severus clutched at the afghan, the sheets and turned his face into the pillow.

The unspoken prayer of *please don't let me die* filtered into his mind, disappearing as quickly as it came, his eyes shutting against the hurt in his guts. He focused on his breathing, the slow and shaky inhale as he tried to calm the ache above his navel, lingering just under his sternum.

His hand rested pitifully against Bump, as though he could persuade the small devil to calm long enough to allow him some rest. Although, Bump answered with a particularly hard kick to his stomach, pressing against the organs of his left side aggressively until Severus dragged his exhausted body from the bed and into the bathroom. Severus retched, fingers clutching hard at the sink, determined not to spend time looking at himself in the mirror. He didn't need to be reminded that his cheeks had sunken, his eyes red-rimmed and smudged with sleepless nights; his lips chapped from all the retching and his gums swollen and prone to bleeding.

Sighing, he slumped against the sink, letting his body slowly collapse – folding inward as though his spine had been stolen. Rolling onto his back, he smoothed hands along the naked swell of his stomach, drawing in as deep a breath as he could, as though the act would sway the nausea in his guts, the ache in his chest, the vulnerable feeling clawing at his insides. Laid upon the cold stones of the bathroom floor, Severus stared up at the towering ceiling and

mentally demanded he be stronger. Gritting his teeth against the emotions roiling just under his skin, prickling at his thoughts.

You agreed to this, wanted it, he resolutely told himself, closing his eyes tightly at the hurt that boiled sharply just under his skin.

Whatever comes of it, you welcomed it, Severus reminded himself, even as another jagged cramp dug at his soft insides. He gritted his teeth against the overwhelming hurt, as tears barbed sharp and unrelenting at the backs of his eyes, dribbling out from under tightly closed lashes and threading through the hair at his temples.

How long had it been since pain had torn him down into something far more human than he'd ever wished to be?

If you're to die on this hard floor, you asked for it, he thought bitterly, chest cleaved open from the hurt; broken from the wish for it all the just end.

24 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a cantaloupe

As classes started back up, Severus took to stalking his classrooms more than strictly necessary, even for the more competent students. Even when there was no fear of his Dungeons catching on fire, he found he felt more at ease moving the length of his classroom, the motion keeping the leg cramps and swelling down. He paced far more than was strictly necessary – ignoring the discomfort in his lower half for the urge to keep moving, even as his students proved more competent than expected.

When the last class filed out of his room, Severus sighed, bringing his hands up to knead vigorously against his lower back, his sides, the slight swells over his belt – groaning. Gods – the pressure felt delicious but not nearly enough. He wanted the touch to bear down to the marrows of his bones, leaving him breathless as fingertips soothed the ache away.

But his hands were too accustomed to his aches and hurts to do so, and instead his fingertips kneaded just roughly enough to take the edge of the ache off but left him feeling relatively unfulfilled. Questing digits dug into his side, massaging the tender spot above his liver as he drew in a breath, the sound a sharp hiss in the quiet of his classroom.

Severus sighed heavily, kneading at his back, the crevices flanking his spine.

"I'd take the raging hormones over this damn backache any day," he ground out, straightening his back almost painfully and rubbing hard at the base of his spine, thumbs pressing roughly against his hips. Sighing again, he made his way into his office, determined to ignore the hurt long enough to get some marking done.

He eyed the small jar of iridescent powder curiously, watching it turn silver, pink, blue, silver in the candlelight.

"Well . . . he's certainly stepped up from leaving me flowers," Severus told Bump softly, rubbing the side of the swell affectionally. The baby twisted under his touch. "Pearl dust is more effective than asphodel blossoms, but I don't think I'll be making too many love potions any time soon," he almost sneered.

Sighing, he started to head into his rooms but stopped short, glancing back over at his desk, the small jar of iridescent powder. Severus turned, collected the pearl dust, and headed into his rooms. He shed his outer robes and filled the kettle, resting his hip against the counter as he waited for the kettle to whistle. Severus watched the pearl dust where it sat on the coffee table, as though he thought it might turn into something else.

Instead, he turned his attention to the small basket Poppy had sent with him. If Severus concentrated hard enough, he could still feel the tingle of magic along his skin from the various spells she had cast over him – checking his weight and heart, the depth of his breath; Bump.

Poppy had tutted pitifully, informed him he'd lost nearly a stone and a half in weight – that he probably hadn't had to lose in the first place if he was honest with himself – despite the cantaloupe sized mass in his stomach and promptly handed him a basket full of what she'd called goodies. Looking through the basket, he found various Muggle things: chocolate protein shakes, something called a coffee scrub, and a suspicious looking handheld thing with wooden spheres that rolled.

Apprehensive, Severus eyed the can of powder, uncertain of how it could make him gain enough weight that Poppy would finally stop tutting disapprovingly as her fingertips smoothed over the ridges of bone, made all that much more prominent as Bump stretched his skin tight against his ribcage. He read the instructions and headed for the kitchen as he pried the lid off and took a cautious sniff. The chocolate smell was overpoweringly sweet, as though to mask the almost chalky smell underneath. Sighing, Severus decided to give it a try – placing a scoop of the powder into an empty jar he found in the kitchenette, filled it with water, and gave it a good stir. Severus couldn't keep in the grimace as he sipped, proving his assessment to be correct. It was cloyingly sweet on his tongue, but the powder

couldn't cover up the chalky taste. He spit into the sink, turning on the tap to wash his mouth of the viscous liquid.

Bump had liked it even less than him it seemed, as nausea cramped his insides, twisting them into roiling coils. He gagged, still feeling it thickly on his tongue. His fingers curled against the edges of the sink basin as he retched, his guts cramping and heaving painfully, dispelling the sip of the shake – along with everything he *had* managed to keep down at lunch.

Breathing shallowly, Severus turned the faucet on and washed his mess away – followed promptly by him throwing the entire can of the chalky substance in the trash.

Warily, he eyed the other goodies Poppy had given him as though they might bite.

The kettle whistled, and he fixed himself some peppermint tea, sipping eagerly at it to wash away the last of the chalky protein shake in his mouth. Finally, Severus picked up the coffee scrub and looked over the ingredients, opening the lid to smell the darkly bitter scent of it.

Poppy had explained the concept to him – vaguely – as something to rub against his skin in the bath or shower, that it should help fade his ever-growing network of stretch marks. However, it wouldn't do anything for the dark line that was just visible along the center of his belly – the linea nigra, Poppy had told him and due to all his hormones.

Setting the scrub down, Severus picked up the final object, running it over his palm curiously. The wooden spheres rolling against his skin caused a rather pleasant sensation. He set it against his thigh and rubbed it a little harder against the ache there, groaning as pressure drew down all the way to his femur, soothing the hurt.

Suddenly taken with the idea of a bath, Severus gathered up the two successful presents and headed into the bathroom. Setting them on the shelf by the tub and turned the taps. Stepping back, he began working on his buttons. Just recently, he'd had to magic the fabric of his shirt and the waistband of his trousers bigger. Poppy had

mentioned a stretchy material – something called elastic – but Severus rather enjoyed his buttons. They helped him feel put together. So, he decided he'd merely magic his clothes bigger every few weeks until it no longer made sense to do so. And then, the simple concealment spell would work well enough to keep him looking fit and trim in his black robes.

Depositing his dirty clothes in the hamper, Severus turned and regarded himself in the mirror, staring at himself critically.

"I think I should be pointed toward the bath," the mirror intoned silkily.

"Most certainly not. If I did that, then you'd ask to be moved into the bedroom next."

"Only when you have guests," the enchanted glass purred.

His fingers cupped Bump, thumbs rubbing the sooty line down his middle, snorting derisively. "The sounds will have to be enough for you, I'm afraid."

Heaving a heavy sigh, Severus regarded himself once more. His hair was much thicker, glossy from the hormones, and his skin was – as Poppy had mentioned – positively glowing. His frame was still overall lean – or much-too-skinny if Poppy was to be believed, his ribs showing more than he ever recalled before as his skin pulled taunt against bone. He couldn't help but feel as though someone had simply inflated a balloon beneath his skin. Severus pulled at his skin, stretching the soft pink tears in his skin to silver before simply rubbing Bump, sliding palms upward over the generous swell.

Turning away from the mirror, he shut the taps off and stepped into the bath. The hot water instantly soothed deep aches, making him groan as his body folded into the tub. Severus picked up a flannel and held it underwater before drawing the dripping cloth against his skin. While he had the desire to scrub the rag roughly against his skin, the knowledge that the air would cool any skin made wet stayed his hand. Instead, Severus ran the flannel along Bump thoroughly before spreading the rag over where Bump broke through the water's surface.

Severus stretched a leg out along the edge of the tub, his hip canting to allow the almost awkward position as Bump left his balance off-center. Picking up the massager, he dipped it in the water and proceeded to rub it hard against his thigh, following the bone, pointing his toes so his muscles flexed.

The feeling was bliss, and Severus groaned.

"This is why I needed to be pointed toward the bath," the mirror griped, and Severus ignored it.

He rewet the washrag and spread it over Bump before twisting enough to rub the massager against as much of his calf as he could reach, spine contorted painfully to accommodate the swell of his stomach. His ribs felt like pin bones, digging into his innards from his position, and he slid his leg back into the cooling water and shifted to repeat the process with his other leg before returning the contraption to the shelf. The ache in his legs having abated to some degree, softened by the hot water and lulled away by the heavy roll of wooden spheres – all of which left him feeling pleasantly tired. Severus let his head loll back against the tub's edge, eyes nearly drifting shut.

Severus caught sight of the scrub and found himself intrigued.

"We'll try this and then head to bed," he told Bump, rubbing his palms along his stomach, rasping the wet flannel along his tender skin before letting the rag sink to the bottom of the tub. He unscrewed the lid of the jar and then shuffled awkwardly into place, both feet and one hand braced against the bottom of the tub to keep himself aloft. The air was cool where it touched his skin as his hips canted out of the water to give himself as much clearance from the water as possible. Without the water making him feel weightless, Severus found it hard to believe he'd lost nearly a stone and a half.

He dug his free hand into the small jar, managing to scrape some onto his fingertips, depositing it just below the knob of his bellybutton. Slowly, Severus rubbed tight circles across the stretched skin of Bump's underside. The coarse grit of the scrub felt odd but pleasant enough as it rasped against his skin as he moved

from hip to hip.

His elbow started to twitch weakly, and Severus sunk back into the blatantly lukewarm bath. He groped around for the flannel and washed off what remained of the scrub, lingered for a moment and then struggled to his feet.

Toweling off quickly, he headed for bed, burrowing into his nest of bedclothes. Severus rubbed his face against the grey and black afghan – a welcoming gift from Minerva when he'd taken his place as Head of Slytherin. The merino wool felt good against his skin as he pulled it over Bump, soft and warm – a necessity for his nest. Severus smoothed his palms up over the underside of Bump, noting the suppleness of the skin from the scrub. He twisted in the covers, trying to get comfortable before wedging pillows in around his body to cushion Bump.

"The scrub was nice, though we'll have to see if it helped," he finally said, sighing sleepily as his hands continued to stroke slowly along the swell of his abdomen. Bump twisted gently in his guts, as though rolling over in bed. An elbow to the kidney before the imp stilled.

"Goodnight, love," Severus muttered, hands falling still on Bump, fingers splayed as if to hold the baby. As much as he hated the bloated appearance of his body, the too-heavy feeling of it on his bones, he found himself feeling content in that moment.

And he let his eyes drift shut.

25 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a head of cauliflower

Severus watched as Lupin gulped at his potion – an explicit show of trust, as the lycanthrope handed him back the empty goblet. For a second, they both eyed each other almost warily, as though it was too stressful to keep fighting about years past but far more uncertain should they let the hate and hurt and anger fall away.

After a moment, Severus drew up his courage, dark eyes glaring at Lupin cautiously before turning downward. "Have you ever thought how all this would have ended had you stopped being friends with Black after the Shrieking Shack incident?"

His tone was harmless in its curiosity as Severus stared down at the silver goblet dangling between his fingers almost carelessly. Because he'd thought of it – specifically the ease of spending time with Lupin in the library in their Fifth Year.

The werewolf – though he hadn't known it explicitly then – had sought him out, asking for help with his Potions studies with imploring hazel eyes and an almost too toothy grin. The lull between them had been gentle, natural, and Severus had let himself be swayed, begrudgingly enjoying the Gryffindor's company far more than he should have. Because he had allowed himself to forget the other's friends and their maliciousness.

But it had all been wrecked by Black the moment he had told Severus how to get past murderous limbs.

"Yes," Lupin finally breathed into the air between them, pulling Severus's gaze from the chalice to meet tawny gold. A soft laugh. "I've thought about it quite often," a moment's pause. "If I had chosen my own dignity over the desire to fit in, it might have played out differently. But not that many kids will accept a werewolf as a playmate and friend." A pointed look in his direction, causing Severus to scoff angrily.

"You would have *eaten* me," he ground out, which was in itself enough of an explanation.

Lupin drew closer, and Severus fought the urge to shrink back warily – instead choosing to ignore the fact that every time the werewolf was within touching distance there was some sort of amorous activity involved to remain stock still, glaring at the lighter man.

"Had I looked at you over our potions text whilst studying and proclaimed I was a werewolf; would you have stayed." The tone was soft, deliberate – as though Lupin knew some irrefutable truth; as though he *knew* that Severus wouldn't have stayed. As though he *knew* that Severus *couldn't* have stayed.

"I was already working it out. I had told my suspicions to Lily," Severus finally said, lips pursed tightly together as he sniffed derisively.

And it was true; the pattern had been rather blatant once he'd grown wise to it. But the thought of being included, foolishly, had led him to believe Black when he'd told him Lupin was waiting for him in the Shack. That for *once*, he wouldn't be made to hang onto the outskirts, but rather was being embraced into the fold. And it had swayed his better judgement.

"Would you have stayed," Lupin asked again, gaze curious in the way it regarded him.

"Honestly?"

The werewolf nodded silently, and Severus couldn't help but feel as though all the breath had been sucked from the room. For a second – perhaps two at the most – Severus thought about offering up a smart-alecky response, but too much had been disclosed already just by asking that small, soft question. He'd never been a coward, so Severus drew in a slow breath, fingers splaying on Bump as he regarded Lupin curiously, trying to remember how it'd been in Fifth Year – before war and death had touched them all.

"I would have rather heard it from you, than to be led like a lamb to

slaughter at the hands of Black; to have a boy who treated me with softness in the library tell me rather than try to rip my throat out, pressing me against a door and snarling like a rabid beast."

The crumpled look on Lupin's face told him he'd said too much, exposed too many fractured bones of their shared past, re-dug old wounds fresh and sharp. But he continued, tone softly neutral instead of the usual acidity he felt when recounting those memories.

"I would have rather my life – the life of poor *Snivellus* – not be made some callous joke by a moronic Gryffindor twat. Were that not part of the equation, perhaps I could answer more honestly."

He gave Lupin a sharper look, feeling his lips curl in a sneer. "And you. All at the expense of you. Secrets exposed, your life nearly ended, you know that. If you had killed me, wouldn't have mattered that it was all a stupid joke you had no part in planning – you'd have spent the rest of your youth in Azkaban awaiting a Dementor's Kiss."

Snorting, Severus shook his head in almost disgust, turning away from the werewolf and heading for the door. "All because of a so-called *friend*," he spat, yanking the door to Lupin's office open.

"He didn't know," Lupin groaned pitifully. And Severus twisted around angrily, glaring at the apparently still-spineless lycanthrope before him. Still defending Black.

"Not even Pettigrew was that stupid. Black orchestrated the whole thing at my expense and *used you*," he hissed, whole body seething. How often had he heard Lupin, Dumbledore, some mindless Gryffindor in between explain it away – *boys will be boys.*

Black had sent him to his death and charmed his way out of the trouble that followed.

"He's dead Severus. You can let that dog rest; it won't bite you anymore." Tired golden eyes implored him to let bygones be bygones. Despair rubbed its way along his thoughts, bumping his skull like an agitated cat in such a way that Severus became acutely

aware that Lupin didn't *want* to admit to the faults of Black.

Almost snarling, Severus turned on his heel and slammed the door behind him. He stalked down to the Dungeons, seething, robes billowing, and in such a state that even his Slytherins fled before him – as though he were a cruel and malicious god.

Blatant disregard infuriated him, but he tamped it down, trying to overlook it.

Severus had come to expect that disregard from Dumbledore, having seen more than his fair share since that near-fatal incident in 1976 – after all, none of them had expected him to come out of the war, so they had allowed him to be used up in preparation to be thrown away. And he had never been anything to Voldemort except a means to an end, a tool and a weapon to use, sometimes a plaything to abuse – then that disregard had been welcomed.

But for it to come from Lupin – who had suffered the same disregard – felt unacceptable.

It was perhaps childish of him, but he swept all the books off his mantle, throwing them to the floor in a tangle of broken spines and bent pages.

Breathing heavily, he cupped Bump through his robes to keep his hands from shaking. "He's an imbecile," Severus ground out, glaring down at Bump as though he expected the swell of his stomach to agree readily with him.

He charmed his robes open and tore them off, throwing them onto the sofa in a tantrum. His hands ran slowly over Bump, trying to calm himself down. Dropping into a chair flanking the fireplace, Severus ran his fingers through his hair, breathing deeply.

"Black was just as much a Slytherin as his family ever produced – sneaky, cruel," Severus told Bump, his tone imploring, as if he wanted someone to believe him. "His stupid bravery was the only reason he was placed in Gryffindor, I'm sure."

For a moment, Severus lost himself in faded memories of long-ago

years.

"A bath," he spoke suddenly, getting to his feet. "A bath and then bed," Severus declared, his hands bracing his lower back as he ambled toward the bathroom.

The next day – it was almost unthinkable how much he wanted to avoid brewing Lupin's potion. And when his final class ended, Severus thought for a moment of simply *forgetting* the necessity of brewing it in favor of grading the essays he had just received.

It might do the werewolf good to miss a dose – if only for spite's sake.

Severus thought of it, the Gryffindor growling and whining in pain as the change overtook him at the end of the week. The moon leaving Lupin broken and hurt, weak with fresh wounds dug into his skin, smudges around his eyes from an exhausting night.

He thought of it as he brewed, taking a small fraction of humor in knowing that he was the reason Lupin would remain somewhat human, even as his curse tore him down into a baser, darker creature.

And when Severus delivered the gleaming chalice to the werewolf, he was hard-pressed to keep from smugly sneering in Lupin's face.

"Drink," he ordered, pressing the goblet into Lupin's hands.

"Severus . . ." Lupin started, holding the still full chalice almost cautiously.

"I didn't poison you, Lupin. Now stop wasting my time, and drink," he snapped out neatly, lips tightening as he gritted his teeth.

A soft, meek chuckle. "Of course not – it would speak ill of your skill."

Of course, the anger he felt was brittle, overly hot as he glowered at the werewolf. Because there was something almost derogatory about Lupin's tone, what he was seemingly implying. His anger turned his mind blank as he glared down at the werewolf, guzzling

his potion rather noisily.

"Albus didn't even think of it – he was more than content to let you consume the trash swill of the Ministry's potion, you know," Severus finally said, accepting the empty chalice quietly as tawny eyes regarded him.

"What."

"Yet another blatant disregard from the noble House of Gryffindor," he sneered, sniffing as he gathered his robes about him and turned to leave. Fingers curled around his forearm, and Severus regarded Lupin with disinterest.

"What . . . explain that," the lycanthrope muttered, tone painful in its curiosity.

Severus gave Lupin a look. "You mean you didn't know." But of course, the stricken look Lupin was giving him, the rasp of emotion along his skull made him all the more certain of the lycanthrope's ignorance. "You may have been one of the *original* favorites of Gryffindor, but it was the one condition *I* made for you to return to teach – that *I* was to be the one brewing your potion. Dumbledore would have merely smuggled you in and kept you tame on that of the Ministry's skill."

While Severus would be among the first to say that there were many potions and draughts that could be mass produced, the mere skill it took to brew a decent Wolfsbane did not make it one that could be left simmering in one cauldron out of five hundred waiting patiently to be bottled. The delicate nature of the potion also made it extremely difficult to multiply the dose one could get out of a single batch. Not to mention the chemical balance of the potion didn't exactly lend the Wolfsbane a long shelf life. And though Severus acted put-upon every time he was to brew the Wolfsbane for Lupin, he was proud to see the adjustments he had made working well. A slight increase of dittany had resulted in no new scars for the werewolf; a sprinkle of moondew left Lupin acting spry the next day; an additional counterclockwise stir seemed the help the other rest.

"You . . . you *demanded* you be the one to brew my potion," Lupin asked softly, eyes imploring. The soft, hazy feeling at the back of his skull made Severus blink, as he realized the lighter man was looking for something more in his actions.

Severus sniffed derisively, glaring at the other sharply. "Of course. You almost ate me twice; clearly you're a danger to children and yourself; to those around you."

Lupin gave him a look, soft and uncertain. "I . . ."

Drawing himself up, Severus glowered at the other. "Funny. Every time you pick *him*, I nearly die. Maybe the question shouldn't have been would *I* have stayed, but rather would you have? Picked Slimeball Snivellus to be your friend over Black."

When no answer was forthcoming, Severus turned on his heel and left Lupin's classroom.

In the Dungeons – he *absolutely wasn't sulking*. Instead, Severus disrobed in the bathroom, letting the mirror have its fill of his skin, and turned the shower on. He turned the knob, cranking the water to scalding, and stepped inside. The bright flush of hurt made it easier for him to ignore that maybe – just maybe – there was something unsavory about still not being picked.

Black had nearly sent Lupin to death row with his little stunt, and still – the lycanthrope couldn't say for certain he would have rather chosen to be Severus's friend than Black's. In fact, the more he thought of it – Severus was certain that Lupin hadn't given him any thought after the whole incident had taken place. Sure, the werewolf had been more absent when Black and Potter pulled their cruel pranks, but there had never been a move to stop it.

Lupin had probably – to some degree – agreed that Severus had deserved it.

Deserved it for being smart, for being enthralled with the Dark Arts, for having survived a near fatal experience with a werewolf, for being from the House of Slytherin, for merely existing.

Further, Severus was certain that only then – after wars, death, and long hours which had thrown them together – did Lupin even remember those days in the library, where they had sat perhaps overly close, in the soft and hazy candlelight. As Severus explained things as patiently as he could, as neutrally as he could. As Lupin had smiled at him, scooted closer, elbows touching.

Only after Black had died was Severus in Lupin's thoughts again.

Snorting, Severus turned his face into the shower's spray, feeling as though the water would melt his skin. The hurt of it was almost comforting, masking the unwelcomed ache in his chest. He stood like that until the water ran icy. The cold air of the Dungeons wrapped around him, sticking to his wet skin, but Severus didn't bother with a towel, choosing rather to climb into bed naked, dragging his blankets over him – letting the fabric wick away the moisture.

The next day, Severus spent every second he could simultaneously ignoring Lupin and avoiding his own thoughts. His free time was scheduled down to the millisecond, keeping himself as busy as possible. He graded between classes; he roamed the classroom while his students brewed; he focused overly hard at brewing Lupin's potion.

When he tugged the door open to his classroom to carry said potion up to the werewolf's office, he was surprised to see Lupin standing just on the other side, wringing his hands nervously – looking for all the world torn between knocking and running away.

"Ah . . . Severus," the other started almost meekly.

Severus raised a brow in question and then stepped back, allowing Lupin to enter his classroom. He didn't say anything as he held the chalice out to the lighter man, merely content to wait. Unlike when he stood in the Gryffindor realm, Severus felt no rush to leave. Because while Lupin's presence was rather unwelcome in his classroom, it was easily overlooked.

Finally, Lupin accepted the goblet of potion from him, and Severus returned to his desk and suddenly found the Third Year essays on

Shrinking Solutions to be rather enthralling.

A suitably empty goblet was placed on his desk just inside his line of sight. And Severus waited for the werewolf to leave. But instead, the lighter man loitered just on the other side of his desk, fingers splayed on the wood cautiously.

"Do you have something to say," Severus finally bit out, lifting his gaze to glare at the seemingly oblivious lycanthrope.

"You . . . you can't have just expected me to choose something like that, Severus. They were my best friends." Lupin's voice was soft, imploring, and Severus snorted.

"How tragic for you. I note you did not offer me the same courtesy and still expected me to choose, despite them being rather relentless childhood bullies." He drawled with a snort, letting his attention return to the essay in front of him, ignoring as Lupin came around the desk – ignoring the sharp emotion scratching against the back of his skull.

Fingers touched his hair haltingly.

"What if I had picked you and you had left me anyway . . . later," the tone was soft, nearly as soft as the gentle card of fingers through his hair, tucking it behind his ear – exposing the shell of his ear, the sweep of his cheek, the sharp cut of his jaw. "A werewolf isn't exactly the easiest of dark creatures."

Severus scowled at the essay, turning his head sharply so those fingers whispered away. "Of course. It's better to lie down with the devil you know rather than the one you don't."

"There were no devils in that – just stupid kids, Severus."

Having had enough, he got to his feet and glared at the werewolf, who stared back at him tiredly as though the whole fight had worn him down.

"You so *willingly* accepted that Black was a murderer. You were Best. Friends. And when that tale was spun, you accepted it as infallible truth." Severus sneered, enjoying the way Lupin's face

drew down in hurt, the ache that hummed at the back of his thoughts. "Perhaps it's because you *knew* what he was capable of, have known since 1976."

"Sirius was just . . . misguided," Lupin whispered, voice reedy with desperation. "Young and stupid. We *all* were."

"Careless and malicious is more like it."

"You were far from innocent in our youth," Lupin finally bit out, jaw tensed as he gave Severus a desperate look – a flash of spine as he defended long-dead friends.

"I never pretended I wasn't a devil. I never hid it," Severus agreed, allowing himself to sink back into his chair, returning his attention to the essay at hand.

"You just always had to know everything we were doing. If you had just left us alone it wouldn't have happened. None of it," Lupin's voice had steadily grown in his desperation – as though the louder he said the words the more truth he could fill them with.

And perhaps Lupin was correct in that assumption – perhaps if Severus hadn't been so curious or so eager for secrets other than his own, the whole situation hadn't happened.

Perhaps if Lupin had continued struggling through Potions instead of asking for help; perhaps if Black hadn't had some misguided sense of almost jealousy at their *almost* friendship; perhaps if Potter hadn't tried so hard to impress Lily, as though being a bully would get him somewhere with her – though admittedly, it had.

Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps.

Severus pulled in a deep breath, fighting down the urge to pinch the bridge of his nose, and gave Lupin a dispassionate look – letting himself go numb to those old hurts once more.

"If it makes you feel better to think I *deserved it*, by all means – do so. But please, do so in your own office." His own words were soft, but his tone was sharp, slicing effortlessly through whatever Lupin thought to be truth – leaving the werewolf to try and backtrack

frantically.

"You *didn't* deserve it. For fuck's sake, Severus just listen . . ." Lupin started.

"I'll bring your potion by your office tomorrow," Severus responded, his quill bleeding over the poor parchment before him as he dismissed the lycanthrope.

"Severus . . ."

"After lunch," he continued quietly, more thoroughly dismissing the lighter man.

With a huffed sigh, the werewolf finally took the hint and removed himself from Severus's office. And he let himself fall into the lull of quietness, broken only by the scratching of the nib on paper.

The following day, Severus spent his morning brewing the Wolfsbane, if only so he could sneak it into Lupin's office while the other was at lunch. He hadn't any desire to see the lycanthrope, especially not as the week seemed to dissolve into old memories, hurtling him back through their shared past – through years of hurts, of bitterness and anger.

Severus returned to his rooms and toed his shoes off, stripping down and replacing woolen trousers with cotton sleep pants. He crawled into bed and pulled the afghan over his head – doggedly ignoring the heaviness he always seemed to feel around the full moon.

And in the morning, he bundled himself into the shower stall for a scalding morning wash. His scalp tingled almost painfully as the water wound its way through his hair. He spelled himself dry and made note of the start of the new lunar cycle as he dressed. He dragged himself to the Great Hall for breakfast, although it all seemed unappetizing to him – the people, the smells, the atmosphere of it all.

Every so often, he'd take note of his shoulders pulling downward heavily, as though defeated or weary. And as he was none of those

things, Severus would roll his shoulders, squaring them with a sigh as he reminded himself to sit up straight.

And Severus blatantly ignored the frozen Ashwinder eggs at his place setting, even as Minerva gave him a look, eyebrows tilted upward in question. He pushed the plate away from him and reached for the tea instead. The first sip scalded his lips, his tongue but he welcomed it.

"That's quite the gift, like he's practically begging you to fall in love with him," Minerva said softly, her head tilting towards him as her tone lilted softly with humor. Severus glowered down into the depths of his teacup. "A lover's quarrel I surmise, after all – why else would he try to ply you with such an expensive gift after you've spent the week in close quarters."

"Piss off," he said just as softly, before returning his attention to his tea once more.

He could feel her assessing look where it ran along his face, as though searching for his woes as his fingers curled around his teacup. And if she found any, Minerva wisely kept them to herself.

26 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a bundle of kale

His thoughts were much too loud. Echoing, rattling off the walls of his skull as his fingers curled around his teacup and he peered down at the unassuming liquid. What he wouldn't have given for a single malt, only to have to settle for chamomile. The floral notes of it choked in his throat, barbing sickly there. Severus wrinkled his nose briefly, mouth twisting sourly as he forced another drink – if only to quiet his thoughts.

Because all those old memories had stirred up old feelings – murky like silt in his chest, in his mind. And really those were something he'd rather ignore. Pretend they had never existed in the first place. He'd had a hard enough time cramming them down the *first* time; he didn't really need a repeat endeavor.

Life really was easier when he bundled himself in bitterness and spite.

". . . Severus," Poppy started in softly, pulling his attention unstuck. He glanced up at her warily, a palm smoothing absentmindedly along the swell of Bump as she folded herself down on the sofa near him. Minerva had been called away to oversee detention – which thank Circe for small wonders, as Albus had relieved him of that duty. And his dinner, if one could call it that, with Poppy had been comfortable as she told him of all the trouble the students got up to with one another.

"Hmm," he hummed, sipping at his tea. Poppy's hand curved along his forearm, her gaze earnest and warm as she stared at him.

"You *know* you deserve to be happy, right."

Those words punched into his chest just as surely as if she had hit him. Severus drew in deep breath through his nose, looking decidedly everywhere *but* at Poppy. His fingers drew aimlessly

along the swell of Bump as he tried desperately hard to *not* think those thoughts. Because as it was, Severus was already on borrowed time, wasn't he. Should have died in the final war. Just being alive was tempting fate – throwing happiness and a stupidly persistent werewolf into the mix seemed like asking for more trouble than he was worth.

"Does happiness come in colors other than red and gold," he finally drawled, resting the teacup against his chest and giving her a pointed look. She snorted at him, rolling her eyes.

"I'm being serious here – and *not* just because you're clearly my favorite Slytherin." Poppy's shoulder knocked against his as she settled in his space. "While I certainly have no qualms about you spending all your time with two old witches," her fingers soothed along Bump, coaxing the baby into a flutter. "I do seem to recall a time when dear Remus was . . ."

Severus gave her a look, cutting off that train of thought of things he'd rather not think about. "That was quite some time ago."

"Time makes the heart grow fonder," Poppy told him demurely, sipping at her tea as she gave him a sideways look.

"I thought that was distance." Severus huffed and took a pointed sip of his disgustingly cold tea. He could warm it – it wouldn't take much – but chamomile wasn't exactly worth his time. He fleetingly wondered if Bump would allow some oolong, or even dragon pearls. Something *other* than chamomile and peppermint.

"The point still stands that Mister Lupin was always someone you tolerated," Poppy muttered, lips pursing in barely concealed amusement. "More than tolerated, one might say."

He could feel his cheeks flush as his mouth twisted into a not-quite snarl. "That was a long time ago," he finally managed, with substantially less bite than he was aiming for as he got to his feet. "We were different people then." And he left his cup on the coffee table, taking his leave – desperate to be done with *that* conversation.

Not that it mattered, because laid up in bed those thoughts clamored in the quiet expanse of his mind. Because he could quite clearly remember their knees knocking together under the table and quiet, private smiles flashed at him over dusty books. Severus remembered the crippling coil of too much emotion, sitting there in the library and thinking what they could maybe be. But those thoughts were better left in his haze of memory as Severus huffed out a heavy breath and pressed his face into his pillows, forcing his eyes closed.

Monday dawned far too quickly, and again Severus wondered about retiring.

He could open a small shop in some out of the way village, brewing for the joy of it and selling his wares for pennies. He could grow most of the ingredients of the more common potions - and what he couldn't grow, he already had a rapport with suppliers over and was confident he could continue getting those ingredients.

Sighing, Severus rolled out of bed, sweeping the thoughts aside as he headed to the bathroom to get ready for the day.

For a moment, as he did up the buttons of his teaching robes, Severus briefly entertained the thought of forgoing the Great Hall. But he had already missed the last couple of meals, and if Dumbledore began to worry there was a very strong possibility Lupin would be the one to come calling. And given the maudlin direction his thoughts had gone the night before, that situation was one he'd rather avoid.

When he stepped into the Great Hall, a hush fell. He was late enough to make a suitable entrance but not so late that food had ceased the ever-constant flow. And Severus found himself a little confused as to why suddenly all eyes were on him, quiet and curious. Until his gaze drifted to his place setting, his steps faltering briefly in their quick stride – slowing marginally.

A vibrantly red rose laid – for all the world – unassumingly on his plate, its petals curled and spread wide open as though picked at the height of its bloom and frozen in time. Something coiled tightly in his chest as he drew in a sharp breath. Stepping up to the table,

he ignored the look Minerva and Sybill were giving him, glaring down his nose at the rose as if the mere sight of it offended him. The stem was thorn-less where it stretched across his plate, proclaiming love at first sight if floriography was to be believed. But he just rolled his eyes, folding himself down into his seat.

Sniffing incredulously, Severus turned to give Minerva a look. "Will you pass the toast, please."

"He must have been a real tosser to be sending you roses," Minerva tutted playfully, handing him the toast with a pointed look. "Be a dear and put him out of his misery, Severus. It was his time of the month last week, surely nothing he's said or done can't be overlooked."

Severus selected a piece of toast, balancing it on the edge of his plate without moving the rose and poured himself some tea as he hummed noncommittally. He nibbled daintily at the crisp bread, taking small bites as Bump twisted softly in his guts, trying to keep from stirring the nausea to the fore. And long after his toast was gone, Severus loitered in the hall, watching dispassionately as the students and other professors filed out one by one. Lupin cast a glance his way, a long look with apologies wrapped up nicely. Severus ignored him in favor of his tea. And when he got up to leave, his fingers brushed overly soft against silken petals, dew trapped there like sparkling new-morning gems. Lupin had cast some sort of freshness spell over it, as though sealing it in a moment of beauty for him to appreciate for years to come.

It took a callous act, but he left the rose at his seat – spurning away the misbegotten and apologetic advance.

Severus billowed into his first class – fashionably late, because he always liked to watch the handful of students who had not completed their homework scrambling to do so – but the action was undermined as he found yet more roses on his desk. Three coral ones – proclaiming desire in the somewhat dead language of flora, though he doubted any of his students knew as much. He fought the urge to touch the petals as he stared down at them as though they were foreign and dangerous things.

"They're absolutely lovely, professor," a misty-eyed Gryffindor proclaimed, clasping her hands together and peering dreamily at him. Because the damnable werewolf had managed to tear his reputation to shreds in a few scant months – leaving Severus almost a character of a romance novella, soft and vulnerable with flowers laid at his feet.

Severus pursed his lips tightly and promptly swept the blown-wide blooms into the waste bin at the corner of his desk. "Open your texts to page 326," he drawled, listening to the frantic fluttering of pages.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully, for which Severus was conflicted. On the one hand, he was grateful the roses had stopped, that Lupin had seemingly received the hint. But on the other, it had been almost nice – sweet perhaps, the little statements of adoration despite the callousness strewn between them. And he tried not to think of that notion overly much.

But when he retired for the evening, there were the four roses, clustered together in a fluted crystal vase he decidedly did *not* own, sitting primly on the bedside table. Severus eyed them warily, reminding himself to strengthen the wards about his rooms once again as a certain lycanthrope seemed to be awfully capable at getting in where he wasn't wanted.

Severus managed to get through the next day unscathed, though he looked warily for hints of misguided romance – because there was too much between Lupin and himself for more than bitterness and hate, wasn't there. It was easier to ignore the werewolf than to look forward to flowers. His glower was enough to defer anyone from mentioning the small tokens of affection, or lack thereof, wisely enough. But when he retired to his office for an evening of grading, he drew up short in surprise.

"Professor Snape?" Pulled back, Severus blinked slowly as though trying to regain his composure before responding to that soft voice. He glanced behind him, where Ainsley stood clutching at his text with an anxious look on his face. Severus tried to stifle the urge to slam his door shut, to hide away the roses, but the boy had already seen, he was certain of it.

Because from the gaped open doorway, it was easy enough to see the spill of roses on his desk, almost artfully displayed, a lovely tangle of silken petals and sharp thorns – all a bright, Crimean pink. Absolutely impossible to miss.

"Yes, Mister Ainsley," he managed – hoping his voice didn't sound as punched out as he thought it did, as his mind ran through floriography curiously, because pink normally indicated thankfulness or grace and neither of which fit with whatever the hell was going on between him and Lupin. Neither of those fit with *anything* that had ever gone on between them, in all the years they had known one another.

The boy opened his mouth, and promptly shut it. His dark gaze once more pulling to that spill of pink across Severus's desk. "Ah . . . I had a quick question on the syrup of hellebore?" But it was apparent that the boy's attention was firmly tangled up in the roses. "Why . . . is Professor Lupin leaving you roses," Ainsley finally asked – much too astute for Severus's liking, pulling a heavy sigh from him.

"Because Professor Lupin is an idiot," he muttered before thinking that perhaps calling Lupin an idiot in front of a student was a bad idea.

Severus sucked in a deep breath and squared his shoulders. "He feels as though offering me potion ingredients will build a bridge of friendship between us. And since I suddenly have so much to do before they wilt, perhaps we discuss the syrup of hellebore tomorrow after dinner, Mister Ainsley."

There was a dismissal there, one the boy couldn't have missed. But still, Severus worried briefly that Ainsley would mention roses were an odd choice for a potential friendship, or worse still – would offer to help Severus with the preparation of the roses.

But instead, the Fifth Year nodded. "Of course, Sir. Tomorrow."

And with Ainsley out of his hair, Severus let himself be pulled in by the roses. The sweet smell of them was heady in the office. And again, there was that damnable curiosity of *why pink*? But as he

drew closer, Severus realized that pink had absolutely nothing to do with it. The petals were crinkled together much more tightly, even opened in full-bloom, and he knew then it was the *type* of rose, not the color that held meaning. Fingers selected a rather pretty bloom from the pile, his thumb brushing over the curve of a velvety petal.

Damask roses – ambassadors of love from a rather old country.

His hand swept slowly over Bump as he regarded the rose in his fingers – perfectly dry, ready for him to pluck the petals from the sepal and use. Begrudgingly, Severus wondered if Lupin had selected the damask roses because their petals were far superior when it came to potion ingredients. The petals dried far easier; the blooms distilled into rose oil perfectly.

"We've gone from leaving me pretty things to at least leaving me useful things," he muttered drily, charming the roses to float and follow him back to his room, weaving a trail of pink in the air behind him as he went.

Severus wasted no time stripping off his teaching robes and rolling his shirt cuffs to below his elbows. Taking shears, he cut the blooms from half the roses, depositing them in a cauldron with oil over a low flame – intent on making enough rose oil for the next few years, which came in handily enough even if he didn't make love potions or beautification potions on the regular.

The air of his private lab took on a sweeter, brightly floral note as the rose blooms simmered, and he tried not to breathe too deeply as Severus went about plucking the petals from the remaining blossoms. They were so lovely, feeling like crushed velvet beneath his fingertips as he filled a pan with them. They would dry for the next month in his storage room, among various other ingredients, leaving the air sweet with their scent.

Again, Severus rubbed his fingers along Bump, feeling the babe twist restlessly at the touch. "He's trying to make amends, leaving me roses for awful things said and done – by him and his alike, I'm sure," he intoned softly before heading for his bedroom. He stripped slowly, trading his work clothes for soft sleep pants before climbing into bed. Severus twisted in his bedclothes, stretching and curling

languidly, trying to find the right spot that would at least let him pretend he would sleep peacefully through the night – though he knew he'd more than likely be up in a few hours.

A contraction cramped his insides, and his hands splayed on Bump, rubbing incessantly until the cramp relaxed. Huffing out a sigh, Severus pulled the afghan over his stomach, running fingertips along his sensitive skin until he dozed off.

Predictably – he woke every hour, nearly on the hour to head into the bathroom to pee. Even the soft candlelight sparked a headache behind his eyes, letting him know the next day would be a joy.

Sometime around daybreak, Severus stopped trying to get back to sleep. Instead, he showered and dressed, the heavy teaching robes draped over his forearm, cast the concealment spell, and headed for the Infirmary.

Poppy was – of course – awake, fully dressed and bright-eyed. She gave him a soft smile. "Good morning, Severus. You look positively dreadful." Her tone was lilting in its humor.

He gave her a derisive snort, settling himself in for tea at her desk. "You can blame your precious Bump for that – won't give me a full night's sleep."

She sat across from him, pouring the tea as she tutted. "Well . . . it is the size of a bundle of kale. I'm sure it's putting a lot of stress on your organs," Poppy agreed, patting his hand sympathetically. "Mostly your bladder, I would assume."

"You would assume correctly," Severus agreed, sipping cautiously at his tea. His hand automatically dropped to rub slowly along the hidden swell of Bump, feeling the baby twist under his palm. "It takes a sacrifice to ancient gods to get comfortable enough to sleep, and then *someone* decides to kick my bladder once an hour," he bit out, glaring down at his stomach.

"You could always try lavender tea," Poppy intoned, giving him a look over the rim of her teacup.

"I've about had it with the teas, thank you."

"Yes well . . . shall we have your visit? Get it over with?"

Severus scowled, but got to his feet. The concealment spell whispered away, leaving his skin overly sensitive as he headed for the back room while unbuttoning his shirt. "I would say you could just pretend everything is going well, but we both know you'd tell Dumbledore."

"He worries about you, Severus," Poppy remarked, ushering him back onto the bed.

"Albus likes to meddle," Severus scoffed, shifting backwards gradually until he was laying flush against the mattress. He tried not to stare at the almost cruel jut of his belly, rising out from the sharp edges of his hips and ribs.

"I see you didn't give the protein shake a go." Her fingertips skated along the ridgeline of his ribs.

"I did," he protested, giving her a look. "It was horrible. I can barely eat as it is, and you thought it best to poison me with overly sweet chalk?"

Poppy rolled her eyes, her hands making their way slowly along the taunt swell of Severus's stomach. "Oh please, Severus – you're being dramatic. Surely it couldn't have been that bad. The Muggles use them all the time."

"Overly sweet chalk," Severus repeated, giving her a much more pointed look.

"Perhaps you should ask your lover-boy for some nice chocolate frogs to go along with your roses," Poppy gave him a coy look. "Fatten you up some."

Severus blanched before scowling. "I will do *no* such thing. I don't need to encourage him. And tell Minerva to stop her gossiping about me and my love life."

"I heard a few Gryffindor girls talking about some lovely coral roses

which you promptly threw away," Poppy quipped, her eyebrows raising. "Really Severus. The boy tells you he desires you and you throw it away?"

He flinched as fingers found a particularly sensitive spot near his kidney, drawing in a sharp breath before glaring at Poppy as best he could. "The werewolf only *thinks* he wants this. He'll change his mind soon enough."

"Perhaps Remus is finally growing up, without Misters Black and Potter around to keep him youthfully arrogant."

He snorted, pushing himself into a seated position once her hands withdrew. "Those two idiots have been dead for quite some time, Poppy. Don't make excuses for Lupin."

"Perhaps you've *both* had some growing up to do," Poppy finally agreed, giving him a look – which he chose to ignore in favor of doing up his buttons, making a noncommittal noise high in his throat. "Your war was never with him. Maybe you should give him a chance, Severus. Give yourself the opportunity to be happy for once."

Severus blatantly ignored her – he would not allow himself to be swayed – as he shrugged on his teaching robes and charmed up the millions of buttons, casting the simple concealment spell. "Thank you for the tea, Poppy." And he headed toward the Dungeons for his first class.

There was a distinct lack of color in his classroom – which made Severus feel somewhat agitated. Even though he had absolutely no reason to be upset at the lack of roses. In fact, he should be glad. But the bright pops of color had been pleasant enough, their sweet scent tinging the almost stale dungeon air. And Severus had absolutely no reason to expect the acts of romance would continue given his callous reactions. He should have been glad that the lycanthrope had finally taken the hint, but there was that tight, curious feel in his chest. But Severus ignored it – he wasn't the type of person one would send roses to anyway.

But when he returned from lunch to find a cluster of three

sweetheart roses of a pale, sooty lavender color on his desk, his eyebrows raised rather dramatically. Enchantment, if floriography was to be believed – or happy love if one chose to focus on the *type* of rose rather than the *color*. And Severus found himself moving the roses into his office, away from where the prying eyes of overly curious students could see them.

And when he retired for the evening, it seemed perfectly natural for the pale lavender to join the coral and the red one. The sooty purple managed to dull the vibrant coral respectively, while the single red rose stood out rather obnoxiously in the middle.

His fingers touched the crushed silk of petals, tracing where the blooms curled and puffed open – frozen at the height of their beauty, left for him to cherish. They were quite beautiful, almost worthy of being cherished. And suddenly, Severus didn't think it was a good idea for the ideals of romance to linger within his rooms, not with his hormones running rampant and propelling him into dangerous thoughts such as those. After all, the last time he had allowed himself to be swayed by the lycanthrope's advances – had allowed himself to appreciate how *hard* Lupin tried – Severus had wound up pregnant.

Which was how he found himself sometime before midnight – in an hour more suited for lovers than coworkers – sneaking his way through the castle, the vase clutched to his chest.

Severus charmed his way into Lupin's classroom and left the vase there on his desk. Vibrant blossoms bobbed at him from dusky shadows, as though waving goodbye. For a brief moment, Severus allowed some doubt to creep into his thoughts – after all, they were very lovely roses – but finally he convinced himself to return to his rooms emptyhanded.

After a rather sleepless night, Severus convinced himself to spend the morning in bed – forgoing eating in the Great Hall to take a long shower complete with ample amounts of coffee scrub and water so hot it made his scalp sting. And when he finally roused himself enough to leave his rooms – to join the influx of students heading toward class, Severus saw Lupin standing outside his door . . . vase of roses in hand. Students were giving Lupin a look, as

though he had gone mad – and perhaps he had.

"What are you doing," Severus hissed as he came level with Lupin, eyeing the seven roses as though they might bite, and ignoring the students as they pushed past them and into his classroom. He could feel his cheeks heating as his mouth twisted sourly.

"You left your roses in my classroom," the werewolf intoned as though Severus had overlooked that fact, cradling the vase somewhat to his chest, almost haphazardly. As though perhaps Severus had merely misplaced the vase instead of leaving it there purposefully.

"I know," Severus replied sharply, heading into his classroom – though he was scandalized to hear Lupin following him. And if he hadn't heard it, the look on his first class's face – Second Year Gryffindors and Slytherins, because of course – would have surely given it away. The students looked torn between being amused and utterly awed as Severus headed toward his desk, completely ignoring the lycanthrope following him. Severus felt his whole mood tip downward into livid as Lupin continued to tear and pick and wreck his reputation as something seething and hateful.

"You couldn't have picked a better *time* for this," Severus hissed, turning abruptly to glower heatedly at Lupin, nearly knocking the vase from the other's hands.

Lupin gave him a curious look, and Severus hastened to put his desk between them. The werewolf set the vase down, fingers fluffing the roses apart from their jostled journey down from Lupin's classroom. "Do you mean sometime when you're not completely avoiding me, Severus. If we could just talk . . ." but Severus huffed, waving away the rest of that sentence.

"You're going to be *late* for your first class. You've already made me late for mine. Leave," Severus grumbled, refusing to look at his students and instead choosing to glare rather formidably at the idiot in front of him. His arms crossed petulantly over his chest, as if he could keep those damn murky, silty feelings trapped beneath his breastbone – way down deep where he didn't think of them.

"I just wanted to bring your roses over. They're so lovely, and I picked them specially for you."

"Lupin," Severus ground out. "Go to class."

The werewolf gave a long-suffering sigh and promptly leaned forward, his lips touching Severus's cheek dangerously close to the corner of his mouth. There was a moment of surprise – that simple act of affection digging down deep in his chest and wrenching – before Severus was spluttering rather dramatically before promptly yanking his wand free of his pocket and abruptly casting *levicorpus* on Lupin. Huffing, he dragged the lycanthrope – who was dangling by his left ankle midair – toward the door. Severus pushed him out the door of his classroom, wordlessly uttered *liberacorpus* with a flick of his wrist, and left Lupin to crash a jumble of robes and limbs on the hard dungeon stones. He slammed the door on the pitiful werewolf piled on the floor. When he returned to the front of his classroom, Severus gave the children his nastiest glare – the one that wisely drove them into silence. The one that he *hoped* reminded them he was Severus Snape, the collectively hated Head of Slytherin with the nastiest temperament of any professor at Hogwarts "Eighteen inches on hair-raising potions. Start, and do *not say a single word*."

All eyes wisely focused on their work as potion texts fluttered open.

Severus waited until his first class had ended, all the students filed out, before he addressed the roses that had loitered on his desk, mocking him because damn Lupin if Severus was going to show any weakness . . . especially in front of students. He moved the vase to his office and shut the door on them, as though locking them inside. Pinching the bridge of his nose, Severus heaved a sigh and found he was in need of a rather strong drink – and completely unable to have one.

Instead, he was left to face four more classes, full of students who eyed the door to his classroom hopefully – as though they expected the misguided lycanthrope to burst into the room at any moment, with yet more roses and perhaps more verbal declarations of undying love. His scowl at least warded the brats away from commenting on what they had surely heard of, driving them into

the silence of writing their essays. Of course, he still noticed the looks they cast in his direction, up through their lashes and their hair as though wondering if they had missed . . . something when they had evaluated Severus. Or perhaps just wondering why Severus had yet to hex the other professor into unconsciousness. And that last thought was something Severus didn't really want to look at too closely himself.

As his last class filed out the door, Severus verily stomped his way up to Lupin's classroom. A gaggle of Sixth Years girls stood in front of Lupin's desk, chatting somewhat aimlessly about Dementors – until they noticed him, at least. The looks he received told him they too had heard – the whole *damn castle had* he was sure. But the look on his face must have been thunderous as the girls huddled just a little closer together as if for protection, while their words came out quick and soft. Lupin was smiling at him, a soft thing, as though he had already mentally excused himself from the conversation and was merely waiting patiently for it to end. Which, thankfully the words petered out rather quickly – effectively falling silent in the amount of time it took for Severus to enter and approach Lupin's desk.

Clenching his long fingers into fists, Severus decided to completely ignore the students – who looked torn between amused and concerned and completely unwilling to just *leave* – to address Lupin.

"Have you lost your *mind*?" He drew himself up to his full height, positively trembling as he glowered, spitting the words at Lupin – who had at least enough sense to let the smile slip off his stupid face. The girls looked scandalized, their gaze jumping from him to Lupin and back again in a never-ending volley.

"Now, Severus . . ." Lupin started, pushing through the students to approach him warily, but the look that must have come over his face stopped the other in his tracks. The werewolf opened his hands in surrender, showing Severus his palms – though Severus would have rather he bare his neck.

"This has gone on long enough," Severus hissed, teeth grinding together in his anger. "You *will* cease this nonsense at *once*! I am quite over being made a fool!" His chest felt like it was collapsing

under the weight of too much emotion – because that sentence was too much. It made him want to curl in on himself, protect his tender underbelly, because he wasn't the type of person people chased. And thankfully, Severus was vaguely aware of the students edging their way toward the door, as though they expected hexing to commence at once.

"Made a fool," Lupin asked, confusion lacing his tone and seemingly erasing Lupin's higher brain functioning as the other moved closer. "I'm not trying to make you out to be a fool? I told you – I want to court you. This is me courting you . . ."

"You *kissed* me – in front of students no less!" And there was that tight, coiling thing behind his ribs, cinching up all those fucking emotions into something that left his tone a broken, wrecked thing.

"Severus," the werewolf managed in a soft tone as though genuinely concerned, which made Severus clench his jaw further. "It was just a goodbye kiss. I was hardly amorous." Lupin's head cocked to the side; eyes darkened with confusion as though Severus's reaction to the mere peck was unconceivable. He wanted to be even more upset at the fact that Lupin was being such an idiot . . . but he only felt extremely tired, worn-thin. Severus pinched the bridge of his nose, drawing in a heavy breath to try and calm himself. Cautious fingers touched his forearm softly, as though testing waters – which anyone else would have known to be unwise, but Lupin had proven himself to be full of Gryffindor bravery.

"Just . . . Lupin, take the notion from your thoughts. I'm – *we're* – too old to play this kind of game." He gave the other a pointed look, the anger whispering away brittlely. The soft thrum of Lupin's feelings edged along his thoughts, pointing at anything *but* a game, but Severus was well beyond being swayed, tired as he was and just wanting his bed.

"My feelings for you aren't a game, Severus. This isn't a game to me."

Some sharp insistency rubbed at his thoughts, the back of his skull, but Severus shook his head. "Give it a rest, would you," he finally said tiredly, shaking Lupin's touch from his arm and heading back

the way he had come.

In the Dungeons, he didn't even bother changing clothes, instead promptly crawled into bed and pulled the blankets over himself, knowing he'd be up in a few scant hours and could properly prepare for bed then. But that jangle of anger kept him from resting, because every time he closed his eyes, he saw Lupin's stupid face, his stupid grin, felt that itch of those stupid emotions – found himself wondering if it *wasn't* a game, and where that would lead. Heaving a heavy sigh, Severus pushed himself onto his back and smoothed his palms along Bump.

The next day passed with bated breath, as the whole castle knew about both incidents and seemed to expect further blowups between the pair. Though wisely, no one mentioned either incident where he could hear – even Minerva seemed to shy away, as though realizing that Severus had reached the end of his rope on the matter. Still, Severus forwent every meal in the Great Hall and avoided Lupin at all costs. He kept telling himself that if he could simply make it through the rest of the week, the whole thing would blow over – that the entire school body would stop gossiping about roses and kisses and lover's quarrels.

But his luck had never been particularly good, so he wasn't holding his breath.

However, Severus was pleasantly surprised to actually make it through his last class of the day with no more advances from Lupin. The werewolf cast long looks in his direction, but otherwise made no moves to approach him. And Severus thought that perhaps the Gryffindor had finally gotten the hint – which made the cinch of emotions catch hold of his breath. He dutifully ignored it.

Until he retired to his rooms for the evening and found five tea roses in deep red situated among the other roses – new and proclaiming rather boldly *always, always, always.* His hand rested gingerly on Bump's swell as he regarded the roses – a full dozen now, showering him in love if floriography had the right idea. Severus swallowed hard and heaved a sigh, shook his head to clear away those creeping thoughts of *what-if*.

"He's lost his mind," Severus told Bump, rubbing the swell slowly. It felt like there was more he should say, but the words weren't forthcoming – so, he merely sniffed derisively at the vase and headed into the bathroom for a much-needed soak in the tub.

27 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a head of lettuce

Slowly, his thoughts pieced back together as he struggled into a sitting position, his arms trembling dreadfully under his weight. Groaning, Severus got to his feet shakily, memories threatening to drag him to the floor again. The bedside table was overturned; his books strewn haphazardly across the rug. One corner of the table was stained darkly, matching the stain on the floor.

Feeling sick, he stumbled to the bathroom, which was a little more difficult as his rooms were still dark and one of his eyes had crusted shut.

The candles in the bathroom flared to life as he staggered to the sink, preparing himself for the worst.

"Oh dear," the mirror tutted, and Severus regarded himself.

"That seems like an understatement," he ground out, turning the faucet on and reaching for a rag.

When he had fallen out of bed sometime after midnight but before dawn – the bedclothes having twisted around his legs traitorously – Severus had found his forehead colliding with the edge of his bedside table, a seam busting along his eyebrow and bleeding like a stuck pig as headwounds were wont to do. He'd bit his tongue sharply on the way down, a tangled heap of blankets and limbs. As he had tried to get to his feet, his body had rebelled and he had retched on the floor, coughing and heaving foamy bile and blood onto the floor before collapsing as his brain thankfully shut off. The pounding in his skull was almost unbearable – feeling like the worst hangover ever and tasting like stale blood and bile.

A glance downward nearly resulted in him toppling over, vertigo swamping him and nearly dragging him to his knees. Severus instead focused his attention on the sink, where water was sloshing

onto the washcloth until the feeling passed.

Sucking in a breath, Severus lifted his gaze to the haggard looking face peering back at him from the mirror. As the rag soaked up the water, Severus inspected his wounds – which were rather superficial. The split seam followed the curve of his eyebrow for the most part, though the blood had plastered the lashes of his right eye to his cheek, drying brackish and dark on his skin. The skin had bruised, the orbital socket had swelled a little. But all in all, for a night spent on the floor unconscious, he was no worse for the wear.

Severus wrung the excess water from the flannel and held it against his eye, wetting the blood enough to loosen his eyelashes and allow his eye to open. He gripped at the edge of the sink, holding himself up as he cleaned the blood from his face. It washed down the drain like rust. Setting the rag down, Severus poked gingerly at the bruising around his eyebrow, drawing in a sharp breath as the pounding intensified. He tugged open the bathroom cabinet and retrieved his jar of Murtlap Essence. The substance was viscous on his fingertips, on his skin as he smeared it over the cut. Almost instantly, the balm soaked into his dermis and soothed the ache. If he paid close enough attention, Severus knew he'd be able to feel the cells of his flesh growing and stitching themselves together.

Drawing in a deep breath, Severus sighed and rubbed the rag over his cheekbones, along his jaw – the hot water returning the blood flow to its rightful place and helping to lessen the swelling.

Finally, the ache behind his forehead lessened enough that Severus could look downward, inspecting Bump for any outward injuries. Slowly, his palms swept along the swell of his abdomen, fingers splayed and searching. He tried to not panic as Bump remained rather still beneath his touch, rather than pressing back against him.

"All right in there," he asked as his fingers kneaded along the stretched tight skin.

The touch grew a little rougher as Severus went, testing for soreness that might indicate internal damage. He held his stomach, hands framing the popped button of his navel while he waited for some

sort of motion.

"If you're sulking, it's rather unbecoming of you." Severus sniffed, letting one of his hands slip downward to palm the upward swell. "It's not as if I enjoy falling out of bed and cracking my damn skull open." He rubbed a little more vigorously. "Spending the night on the hard floor, bleeding."

Still nothing, and Severus felt panic begin to choke high in his chest.

Bump was the size of a head of lettuce, was finally breathing, beginning to have brain activity. The thought of all development and growth of the baby ending at that point was more troublesome than he would have liked. Not to mention, he was two thirds of the way through the whole endeavor, and if asked under threats of torture, he would admit to wanting to see it through, to holding his child, feeling its tiny hands cling to him, its heart beating in its chest.

"Really. You're *really* going to be an insufferable brat and make me get dressed and worry Poppy all because you've stopped responding. Really," Severus drawled drily, glaring at the swell of his stomach. "And Minerva . . . she's an absolute bear when surprised out of sleep."

Heaving a deep sigh, Severus turned and started to head back into his rooms for some outerwear. "For Circe's sake. You're being ridiculous," he grumbled, a hand still splayed on his belly as he went about shrugging on his teaching robes.

He breathed a sigh of relief as Bump finally – *finally* – twisted under his touch, giving a sharp kick to his palm. Severus let his teaching robes fall to the floor, both hands cupping Bump. The baby fluttered under his fingers, pressing against the taunt skin of his abdomen. For a moment, Severus thought of weeping in relief. Instead, he cleared his throat.

"Glad you've stopped your pouting, you imp." He drew in a deep breath. "How about a bath. I think we both deserve it; the floor is rather too hard for us, isn't it."

A gentle curl of movement under his touch, and he nearly smiled, letting his palms run lovingly over his stomach. Severus turned and headed back into the bathroom to draw a nearly scalding bath, with every intention of laying there until the water turned cold.

28 Weeks - Your baby is the size of an eggplant

"You're expected to have tea with Poppy and myself this evening in my office," Minerva told him softly as they sat at the head table.

He sipped his tea. "And if I'm not feeling up to it and refuse?"

"We'll bring the tea to you. You've been terribly remiss as of late."

"I wasn't aware that us taking tea together was a requirement of our friendship," Severus quipped.

"It is. As of this exact moment." She gave him a pointed look. "And you had better be in my office this evening after class."

Severus made a noncommittal noise in his throat, sipping his tea to keep from saying anything. As it was, he'd become rather taken with the routine of returning to his rooms the very moment his last class ended, taking a hot bath, and then crawling into bed. Not that he actually slept that much, but it was nice to pretend maybe he *would* sleep that much.

Minerva pinched the tender underside of his arm playfully. "it's just tea, Severus. Surely you can afford us a few moments of your time."

"Twenty minutes," he negotiated, giving her a sideways look as students began to file out of the Great Hall, lunch having ended.

"An hour."

He managed to make a very put-upon sigh before finishing the rest of his tea and getting to his feet.

"An hour, and not a moment more."

Severus spent every second between then and the end of the day dreading the impending teatime in Minerva's office. If only because

on top of being irritably exhausted, Severus found it hard to pull in a deep breath, and his abdomen was more sore than usual as the Braxton Hicks contractions cramped at his insides more periodically.

Not to mention every cell in his body ached dreadfully. And more and more he was regretting agreeing to Minerva's request – or demand, rather. But still, as his final class filed out the door, Severus followed on their heels, heading upward toward Minerva's office. He would sit there for his hour, do his suddenly demanded act of friendship, and then return to his rooms for the evening.

Of course, the small party wasn't what he had expected as he pushed the door open, even as Poppy and Minerva let out a cry of joyous welcome. Streamers hung from surfaces, a buttercream yellow and a sage green – grey balloons softened the sharp corners of the window, Minerva's desk. Emotions bloomed in his chest like stupid roses as Poppy ushered him into the room, her arm wrapped around his shoulders tightly. There was just the three of them, and Severus let himself smile. He charmed his heavy teaching robes open and left them just inside the door.

"Really. This is unexpected."

"Oh, come now, Severus! Of course, we had to throw you a party, my dear," Poppy quipped, hugging him tightly. Her hands touched the hidden swell of Bump softly. "This is the start of your third trimester; homeward stretch – you deserve a party."

Minerva was already pouring tea for them, beaming at him. "Poppy tells me that Bump's the size of an eggplant now." She beckoned them over, situating him on the low sofa and handing him a teacup. Before he could respond, the fireplace belched green fumes and Albus stumbled out into the room, dusting off his shoulders as he grinned at Severus.

"Ah, yes – well my dear boy, don't you look slim and trim in your shirtsleeves," Dumbledore teased him, and Severus heaved a sigh.

"That's Albus's covert way of saying he wants to see Bump, I think," Minerva said with a huff, rolling her eyes as she moved to pour yet

another cup of tea.

"I rather gathered that." Rolling his eyes, Severus let the concealment spell whisper away and tried not to flinch at the sight of his shirt stretched almost comically over his swollen abdomen. The buttons strained against the fabric in a way that reminded him it was nearly time for him to magic his clothes bigger once more. There was a collective coo from Minerva and Albus. Thankfully, Poppy had already gotten her cooing in earlier in the week at their visit and simply smiled at him.

Severus tried not to grimace overmuch as foreign hands – namely Albus's – cupped Bump, speaking to the baby within and reminding him he was merely a vessel for which life grew. He felt a little more bitter than he would have liked at that sentiment but attributed it to countless days unintentionally fasting and even more sleepless nights. Instead, he sipped his tea and put it out of mind as they made over Bump.

"It's nearly over, dear," Poppy encouraged, patting his shoulder softly. "Just about twelve more weeks."

"Oh joy," Severus ground out, slumping back into the sofa as his spine curved under Bump's weight. "Three more months in the fat suit." He rolled his eyes, resting his teacup high on his chest so not to interfere with the still ongoing infatuation on Albus's part, as Minerva had finally decided to join present company and converse.

"You're not fat; you're pregnant," she told him sharply, sipping at her tea. "Besides, if we were to see you from the back, we'd never know you were with child."

"Glad I've maintained my girlish figure," Severus drawled drily, lips pursing in almost amusement. But the fact remained he was all knobby limbs and sharp edges aside from where Bump jutted.

"He's lost nearly two stone as it is, Minerva," Poppy harrumphed, giving them both a look.

"See, Severus – you'll come out of this more svelte than ever," Minerva quipped, giving him a sly smile. To which Severus merely

rolled his eyes.

"I just have to suffer through it first," he replied, his hand splaying carefully on Bump's side over his liver, effectively running Albus off.

"Oh, surely it's not that bad, my dear boy," the old man teased, magicking a tray of finger sandwiches from somewhere near Minerva's desk.

And Severus chose not to say anything – because he knew that Poppy shared all the details of their visits with the older man. If after hearing those details – minus the collapsing, of course – Albus still thought the pregnancy wasn't that bad, Severus didn't feel the need to try and sway his mind. As he watched the others nibble on what appeared to be cucumber sandwiches, Severus pushed himself to his feet and made his way over to the kettle, filling up his teacup. The slight movement alleviated some of the ache at the base of his spine – though it pushed said ache forward onto his pelvis.

With his cup filled, he turned around to retake his spot on the sofa but stopped as the cushions had seemingly been overtaken by a myriad of packages. Poppy and Minerva had curled up together on the smaller sofa, and Albus had taken a seat in the chair. They all looked at him expectantly, positively beaming as he retook his seat on the sofa.

"What's all this," he asked rather pointlessly as he could discern what it was.

"It's your baby shower," Albus exclaimed, looking by far the most excited of all of them as he wiggled in his seat, humming around his bite of sandwich and watching Severus with glimmering eyes.

"It's a Muggle thing," Minerva further explained at Severus's sideways look in hers and Poppy's direction. Poppy had leaned back on the older professor and was smiling very softly at him.

"How quaint," Severus finally managed, unsure of how else to respond as he looked at the piles of brightly wrapped packages.

"Well, go on then! Open them!" And Albus was *certainly* the most excited of them, clenching his hands together tightly as he sat on the edge of his seat, watching Severus – who cautiously reached for the package nearest him.

Growing up, he'd never received many presents, so there was a certain sting of irony in the fact that he was being gifted with probably more presents than he had ever received in his entire lifetime – all for someone who hadn't been born yet. He tried not to think that though, as he opened the first box which turned out to contain bath necessities for the baby. There were soft washrags in greens and greys, lavender scented wash and shampoo and lotion, a hooded towel to make the wearer look like a frog, and a gaggle of assorted floating bath toys all designed to make bath time more fun. And Severus appropriately ooh'ed and aww'ed over the items, and truly he was grateful for them because he hadn't the *slightest* idea of what an infant needed to remain alive, let alone healthy.

The next box contained burp cloths, bottles, a pacifier, and what looked like more powder. Curiously, he glanced over at Poppy – certain she had given him the gift. A bashful smile gave him his answer.

"It's baby formula, Severus. The Muggles use it." She gave him a helpless shrug. "But I'm going to ask my friend about what they tell mothers who can't nurse."

"Yes well – that would be best, considering that particular part of my anatomy hasn't changed."

"You're as flat as a prepubescent and always will be," Minerva quipped, though she had forced Poppy to straighten up enough for her to get to her feet. She had rather specifically chosen his next package, placing it in his lap before retaking her seat, arm coming around Poppy easily.

"From you, I presume," he drily drawled, giving the older professor a look as he followed the crease of the wrapping with a fingertip, taking his time breaking the tape.

"Just open the damn thing," Minerva snapped out playfully, huffing

in mock annoyance as Severus squeezed the sides of the package lightly.

Finally, Severus opened the present, letting his fingers pull slowly over the blanket, feeling the softness of the fabric. The afghan was a pale green, stripped with grey and edged in pale yellow. Wrapped inside the folds, he found a matching hat and mittens.

"It's lovely," he finally managed, smoothing the blanket over his lap. Minerva beamed at him. Though, he wasn't able to appreciate it more as Albus bundled the knitted items up and off his lap, replacing them with another present.

The gift contained clothing. Actually, the next five gifts contained clothing for various ages, of various styles. From onesies, to pants and shorts, shirts and sweaters, socks, pajamas, and even an outer coat. In a myriad of colors, none of the articles giving away a specific gender. Which Severus found himself grateful for, though he would have been lying if he told himself he *wasn't* looking for some hint at the baby's gender. But Minerva and Poppy had done an excellent job, picking muted shades of all colors.

The next present he found in his lap was a rather large box that contained toys to promote the baby's development – teething rings, a rattle, books made of fabric, some kind of soft box made of shape cut outs with the shapes inside, a bumpy ball of various shades and fabrics that rattled. As he set the box to the side, Severus found himself smiling – though feeling a bit overwhelmed.

"The last presents we already put in your room," Minerva said, reaching over to clasp his hand.

His eyebrows canted upwards slightly. "Oh?"

"It's furniture," Poppy cut in, as though she couldn't allow Minerva to have all the glory. "A crib with a changing station, a playpen, a three-bin organizer, and a rocking chair."

"You're ready for a baby," Albus broke in, all wild grins and glinting eyes. "I can hardly wait!"

For a tiny moment, Severus feared he would cry. Instead, he offered up a small smile. "That's unexpected. You all didn't have to go to this length."

"Oh Severus, we have to – otherwise how else would we guilt you into time with the baby if we didn't," Minerva teased, though he could see tears glimmering in her eyes.

"It takes a village," Poppy intoned, scooting onto the couch to rest a hand over Bump.

The three clustered around him, hugging him as best they could as they formed a mob. And his words escaped him. All the gifts opened, Albus nibbled one more cucumber sandwich and then excused himself to get ready for dinner. He and the women continued to sit, sipping tea and conversing – though Severus for the life of him couldn't have repeated a single word, as he let himself float in that warm, comfortable headspace brought on by being surrounded with friends and something a little like love. And his heart cinched at that, because he couldn't quite shake the feeling that something was missing.

"I'm going to make some more tea. Poppy dear," Minerva asked, giving the mediwitch a very pointed look as she got to her feet. A brief moment, and then Poppy was giving him a smile and getting to her feet as well, the two women beating a hasty retreat – and it only took him a moment to realize why.

Lupin had just come through the door. And there was that tight coil of emotion in his chest as Severus eyed the werewolf. Lupin approached the sofa where Minerva and Poppy had set him up with all the presents spilled around him on worn-soft cushions. Hesitation hummed along his skin as if the lycanthrope still had one foot out the door. Wisely, Minerva and Poppy busied themselves with the tea and promptly ignored what could be an impending disaster scene, continuing to talk in fervent whispers on the other side of the office.

"Hello Severus," Lupin said demurely, giving a slight smile.

A soft feeling itched its way across the back of his skull curiously,

and Severus managed to scowl just a little – though he'd rather not think about how difficult of a feat it had been. His hands splayed on Bump as he tried rather hard to not seem too irritated. Though he wasn't exactly sure what he was irritated for; whether it was because Lupin had shown up or rather because the other was dreadfully late. His hour was drawing to a close, Severus noted as he glanced at the clock. And the party had been rather exhausting, even if most of it had been spent opening presents and talking with friends.

"Fashionably late I see, Lupin."

The lighter man rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly. "Ah – yes well, I was debating on whether or not I was coming or if I should just drop my gift off with Minerva. Poppy insisted I come, but I didn't want to upset you . . ." and he trailed off lamely, giving Severus a bashful look.

Severus sighed. "This whole thing is tiresome as it is; I can't imagine you'll make it much worse by merely being *here*." And against his better judgement, Severus pushed the knitted blanket and matching hat and mittens to the side, making enough room for Lupin to sit. Which the other did, rather quickly and without much coaxing, attention drawn to the contents of the bag. Promptly, the werewolf withdrew a small stuffed animal and held it out to him, which he took cautiously. It amused him to see it was a small grey and white dog; the inside fabric of its ears was green and cream plaid, matching its bowtie. Its eyes and nose were stitched on; the fur was soft against his skin.

"A dog." His tone was droll, because leave it to the werewolf to give him a present like . . . that.

"A wolf seemed too bold," Lupin replied, humor lacing his tone. "I hope the color is right. Poppy told me the color scheme they'd chosen, but I've never been good with shades . . ."

"Rest assured, Lupin – the child won't give a damn about if the shade of green is exactly right." He sniffed, rubbing a soft ear between his thumb and forefinger. "And I don't either – as long as it's green and not some horrendous shade of scarlet." He gave the

other an almost teasing look, who grinned back at him.

"I wouldn't dream of polluting our child with Gryffindor colors – the Sorting Hat will do it for me."

Severus opened his mouth to respond but stopped as the word *our* sunk in. It wasn't often that he acknowledged Bump to be half Lupin's – if only because it made it easier for him to pretend the child had and *needed* only one parent. It was even less often that either he or the werewolf mentioned it aloud. And he hurried to put the small animal down atop a group of clothes.

"I said the wrong thing, didn't I," Lupin finally said, breaking through the heavy silence that had spilled in around them.

"Nothing you didn't have the right to say," Severus bit out, all clipped and angry tones – nearly sounding hurt, for which Severus hated himself and all his weak emotions. He shifted on the couch, drawing in a deeply irritated breath – and the werewolf seemed to understand his time had run out of amenable company in Severus's presence, clearing his throat anxiously.

"Ah yes . . . well, before you throw me out," Lupin started as he thrust the bag at Severus. "The rest is for you."

Severus managed to not show any outward signs of shock, but he could feel his spine tightening. And there was that damnable coil of emotions, tight in his chest. Because while he had received many presents given that it was only Poppy, Minerva, and Albus in attendance – they had all been for Bump. And while the blanket, the clothing, the hat and mittens, the development toys, and the furniture had been appreciated, it would still have been a little nice to receive something for all his troubles. And leave it to the fucking *werewolf* to recognize that.

Snorting, he sifted through the contents of the bag, finding various concoctions for the bath for supple skin, a foot soak, something called a deep conditioning hair mask, more of that coffee scrub, clover honey and ginger candy drops, thick sleep pants, and cushy socks. For some reason, that tight thing in coiled in on itself, cinching sharply as Severus looked down at the presents. He

swallowed hard against a suddenly dry throat because there was something like appreciation burning him up inside.

"Lupin," he started, letting his words trail off.

"I went to a Muggle shop, and the girl told me these were all good presents for a somewhat *nontraditional* mother." The werewolf was wringing his hands. "So, if it's not good, I can . . . I don't know, you could tell me something you'd like? I just . . ." And again, the werewolf fell silent, giving Severus an anxious look.

"Thank you, Lupin. It's appreciated," he finally managed, even though it pained him to admit that the werewolf had done a good job. Already in his mind, Severus had traded the thin cotton for the thick, soft linen pants at the bottom of the bag. Something very similar to relief itched at the back of his thoughts. Lupin had taken on that peculiar look that Severus had begun to associate with grabbing hands and Bump coddles.

"May I?"

For a brief moment, Severus entertained the idea of saying no – of refusing Lupin the parental joy of holding Bump as close as he could until the baby was born. But he nodded, watching as Lupin shuffled closer on the couch. And that coil of emotion in his chest had sunk down into his belly as the lighter man bent down, hands cupping around his mouth as Lupin seemingly whispered something to Bump. He wanted so badly to hate how his fingers itched to card through those greying locks. He swallowed that thought down, ignoring how *right* the sight of the werewolf bent over him felt. Severus could feel the hot exhale of the other's words through the thin fabric of his shirt but was unable to discern what the werewolf was whispering.

Hands smoothed over Bump as Lupin sat up, smiling softly. "Thank you."

"And what did you tell the imp," Severus asked, curiosity getting the better of him.

"That's between us," Lupin replied as his hand rubbed the swell of

his stomach, smile turning cheeky as Severus pursed his lips.

He opened his mouth to say something, but Lupin closed the gap between them, lips pressing against his feather soft. The pressure lingered for a second – two at the most – before Lupin pulled away, looking torn between decidedly smitten and concerned for his personal safety.

Severus frowned, uncertain of how to respond, and instead merely stared at Lupin as if trying to piece a retort together. And failing dreadfully, because truly what could he say. It wasn't as though the werewolf had pawed at him, pushed him down and ardently mauled him. Severus wasn't even sure that brush of lips had counted as a proper kiss. Not to mention his heart felt like it was doing something rather complicated against the bones of his chest. Which he'd rather not think about but had no choice *but* think about it. And then the clock chimed, offering him a way out, and Severus swayed to his feet as he swallowed against the dryness in his throat.

"Your hour's up Minerva." He smoothed a hand down his back, pressing against the base of his spine. "I'll get these things out of your office soon, but I'm dreadfully tired."

Minerva waved him off, her gaze darting between him and Lupin almost comically, making inquiries with her eyebrows alone. "No rush, Severus. You've still got a few months to go."

Nodding, he beat a hasty retreat to his rooms.

29 Weeks - Your baby is the size of an acorn squash

His hormones were running wild again. Even laid back on the bed, all he could think about was redoing his bedroom to make it seem a bit more, well - homey for when the baby came.

Once Severus had finally managed to move all the items from Minerva's office to his chambers, it had seemed to take forever to magic all the furniture into suitable positions. The playpen had taken up residence in the kitchenette; the crib and changing station were pressed flush against the wall between his armoire and a corner; the rocking chair sat cattycorner to the crib; the organizer was position right off the bathroom door.

Of course, he'd also moved everything around a half dozen times already. And still got that itch when he woke up around midnight to move everything yet again.

"It's called nesting," Minerva told him, leaned against the hospital bed near his head while Poppy cast the basic inquisitive spells, magic sparking over his skin.

"Know all about it do you," he managed to hiss out, as Poppy's fingers prodded at his sides, tracing the furrows of his ribs. "I'm sure Poppy's about talked your ear off about my situation."

Minerva gave a shrug, casting an affection gaze on Poppy – who was humming softly as she worked, completely ignoring the two of them. Her hands had moved to his obliques, then down to his hips, thumbs pressing and kneading at his skin. "It makes her happy – and making her happy makes me happy."

Severus snorted, even as his fingers knotted in the sheets at a particularly hard cramp. Which was followed by Poppy pressing fingers to the hard band of muscle, trying to coax it into relaxation.

"You could . . . always adopt," he offered up, tone soft and uncertain – because if something happened to him, if the child was suddenly pushed onto them, he wanted to know it wasn't a truly terrible thing in their minds. Minerva had never expressed wanting children, but he could see all of that changing if Poppy only said, but Poppy had never said. Which was precisely the time that Poppy chose to join in their conversation, shooting them both a severe look.

"We're too old for that," she said – and Severus wasn't exactly sure who she was telling, himself or Minerva. "Besides, I like our quiet time." That was pointedly at Minerva, as though Poppy was trying to make a point.

"You've a big heart. Wouldn't you have liked some children of our own? To have grandbabies by now?"

The look that crossed Poppy's face left Severus's chest feeling tight. Because as it was, Minerva would move the heavens for the mediwitch – if only Poppy would ask for it. But Poppy merely leaned forward enough to press a chaste kiss to Minerva's cheekbone.

"You're quite enough for me."

The edge of anxiety that had taken up in Minerva's gaze smoothed away, leaving behind a soft smile.

"And you," Poppy snapped out, turning her attention abruptly on Severus. "You've lost another half a stone! What would I need children for – I mother you enough as it is. Fat lot of good it does." But she seemed to know, as she always did, the current underneath Severus's tone, what he was asking of them without truly asking. Her voice was soft and affectionate, as her palm smoothed over Bump, giving him a very pointed look that Minerva seemed to miss. "And this is as good as my . . . our grandbaby anyway, Minnie. We don't need any others."

Again, there was that overly tight feeling flooding his chest, and Severus gritted his jaw to keep from saying something overly sweet to the women hovering over him. Because he knew without a doubt

that Poppy would gladly welcome the child into their home if needed, would happily take the child in as their own flesh and blood as they had done with Severus.

"Now's the time you tell me the imp is the size of a damn tire and let me get on with my day," he finally managed, tone lacking any sort of the proper amount of snark.

"Yes Poppy, Severus has a hot date later tonight with his moonstruck lover," Minerva cackled behind him, earning her a rude hand gesture as Severus tried to pull himself into a seated position in preparation for rolling off the bed.

"I feel a more pressing need to reorganize my damn rooms, rather than to spend time with that cur," he ground out, giving her a glare as she helped pushed him into a proper sitting position.

"Your baby is the size of an acorn squash," Poppy responded, as he slid off the bed and began to dress. "And seemingly perfectly healthy. If only I could get some weight to stick to you."

He made a noncommittal noise in the back of his throat as he did up the buttons of his shirt.

"I mean it, Severus. You're far too thin – especially for this sort of thing," Poppy continued, giving him a sharp look even as she let herself lean against Minerva briefly.

"Yes mother," he grumbled softly, ignoring the scandalized look Poppy shot him and the howl of laughter that tore itself from Minerva's chest. As Poppy spluttered behind him, trying to come up with a properly scathing remark, Severus fled the Infirmary in favor for his Dungeons.

But as it was, Severus had to force himself to focus on brewing Lupin's potion – as he had done for the last three days. There was something to be desired in the way Poppy and Minerva fit together – in a way that his own family had lacked. Emotion furled sharply behind his ribs. But that was easy to ignore as his body had really begun to suffer from standing for the prolonged timeframe in which it took for the Wolfsbane to brew. He shifted from side to side while

he stirred, trying to alleviate the pain in his thighs as he waited for the potion to turn the appropriate color of silver. He kneaded his lower back, grimacing briefly before he set about ladling the potion into the goblet.

Thankfully, Lupin had picked up the habit of showing up at his classroom right after dinner without having to be told – saving him the walk upstairs on tired legs and swollen feet. Setting the chalice down on front of the werewolf, Severus resumed kneading at his lower back, body curving to allow more pressure to be applied.

"I can rub your back if you'd like, Severus."

And it certainly didn't help that his first thought was leaning over the desk so Lupin *could* rub his back, especially since he knew it probably wouldn't end at a simple back rub. His hormones were still sparking against his skin.

"I'm fine," he ground out as he pushed the goblet closer to the werewolf. Their fingers brushed as the cup changed hands. And once the emptied goblet had been returned to him, the lycanthrope stood just in front of his desk, watching him with curious eyes.

"If I promise to behave, will you let me?"

For a moment, Severus was sorely tempted – Bump was crushing against his spine. He shifted, tilting hips forward a bit to shift the weight of the baby from his spine to his pelvis, which didn't really help. A particularly hard cramp in his guts made him draw in a sharp breath, grimacing. Severus leaned against the desk, a hand splaying on his swollen belly.

"I'm fine," Severus bit out, glaring at his desktop. "Just go."

Silence dragged on until there was the soft click of the door shutting.

Although, the following day when Lupin once again made the soft offer to rub his back once the Wolfsbane had been consumed, Severus merely nodded. He hated himself momentarily for giving into that weakness, but apparently acorn squashes were heavier

than Severus originally thought. And his back hurt. And Lupin was infuriatingly earnest.

Which was how he found himself straddling a workbench, tucked in between Lupin's widespread thighs. One of his hands splayed on the bench keeping himself at an angle, while the other rubbed along the swell of Bump. The classroom door was shut, and it was that time between dinner and curfew, so Severus didn't expect any students to come knocking. He had let the concealment spell whisper away, seeing no point in maintaining that façade as his hormones knocked around in his skull. Large hands kneaded heavily at the sore muscles of his back, overly hot through the fabric of his shirt – causing him to quiver. Severus breathed out slowly, trying to beat back the quivers that hooked in his shoulders, but ended up just making them more apparent.

Want was itching its way across his skin again, trickling out from under Lupin's strong palms.

"Are you all right," Lupin asked him softly, voice much too close to his ear, breath tickling his skin. "Am I hurting you?"

Not trusting himself to speak, Severus shook his head. But a particularly hard rub at a knot near his spine did cause him to suck in a sharp breath, arching up into the touch just barely out of instinct. Because the touch was that delightful kind of heaviness that Severus wanted but was unable to achieve himself. The hands on his back stopped their motions, resting against the sharp cut of his shoulder blade and along the ridge of his spine. Lupin's breath fluttered softly against his skin, and there was that tightness in his chest and something quite a lot like want. Which abruptly thrust him into the reality of the situation. Namely that he was in a rather compromising position, hard and vulnerable, with Lupin crowding the bench behind him, hands roaming tenderly along his back. The touch was no long a back rub, but the slow seduction of soft caresses. And Severus choked on the whimper that rose high in his throat, clumping in a tangle of emotions – both his and Lupin's; hot and headily pressing against his skull. He was quivering, both hands on the bench to keep himself in an upright position.

"Are you sure you're all right," a soft question as hands came around

to cup his sides, touching Bump.

The werewolf leaned forward, chest touching lightly along his back. The touch on Bump was firmer, thumbs rubbing small circles. Severus was distressed to find it was hard for him to draw in a deep enough breath. Because he was focusing overly much on the heat Lupin was exuding, the heady feeling making his thoughts hazy with want. Emotions knotted in his chest, sitting heavily on his diaphragm.

"You should go," Severus finally managed out, tone decidedly less venomous than he would have preferred.

"I thought I was rubbing your back?"

"That seems to have stopped," he responded with as much snark as he could and extracted himself from the werewolf, struggling just a bit to get to his feet. He was suddenly desperate to put as much space between him and Lupin as possible because stupid, *stupid* emotions.

"Same time tomorrow," Severus managed, pushing into his office and shutting the door resolutely behind him. He retired to his rooms, specifically a very hot shower with coffee scrub and nails scrubbing at his scalp and then bed.

The next afternoon, as Lupin offered yet another back rub after the potion had been consumed, Severus had to bite his lip to keep from agreeing. He was sorely inclined, with the recent memory of strong hands against his skin rising easily to the fore of his thoughts.

"Severus," Lupin said softly, calling Severus's attention back to the werewolf as the darker man beat a hasty retreat.

"No Lupin," was all Severus said before shutting his office door firmly behind him.

And by the end of the week, Lupin seemed to have given up the idea of offering a back rub, as though having realized it to have been just a one-time thing. So instead, he stood there awkwardly just on the other side of Severus's desk – staring.

"Do you have something to say," Severus sneered as haughtily as he could as a cramp took up in his guts, Bump clenching painfully tight around his spine, crushing his hips before relaxing marginally. He was surprised when the werewolf moved, coming around the desk in a clear invasion of personal space as Lupin was so wont to do. Fingers reached out, cradling his wrists and thoroughly lulling him into silence. Peculiar hazel eyes regarded him quietly as fingers slipped down to hold his, thumbs drawing small patterns across the backs of his hands.

Severus had little idea of how to respond to the situation – standing there in almost comfortable silence while Lupin held his hands and stared at him in that almost dreamy way. There was that cinch in his chest, almost unbearable. And he swallowed hard and tugged, slipping his hands from the lycanthrope's just as softly as they had been grasped.

"I appreciate you brewing the potion for me," Lupin finally said, tone soft. "Especially as I've nearly attacked you twice since we've met."

He snorted, waving the sentiment away. "Don't dwell on it, Lupin."

"I mean it, Severus. I know you don't have to; I know there are other ways to get it. But it means something to me that you'll brew it."

"It shouldn't. It's my mastery. I would brew it for anyone inside these walls." Severus wasn't entirely sure why he was trying to lessen the severity of the situation. Because as it was, it was nice for it to be recognized that nearly a week was spent on the potion that kept Lupin tame.

"Still," Lupin continued, voice earnest and low, fingers once more brushing his even as Severus stepped back. Some soft emotion nearly purring against his thoughts, his skull. "I appreciate it more than you could know." A soft chuckle. "Especially as one of the *original* Golden Children of Gryffindor."

The quip shocked a laugh from him, quick and sharp and bundled away the moment it left his chest to keep it from continuing.

Fingers took his up once more, Lupin pulling his hands toward him. His chest felt decidedly tight as the lycanthrope brushed his lips feather soft against Severus's knuckles, the mere hint of a kiss lingering briefly before the other whispered "thank you" against his skin.

And suddenly uncertain, Severus tugged his hands from Lupin's once more and fled the sanctity of his office for that of his rooms.

30 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a zucchini

"It's the size of a zucchini," Poppy told him, her tone bright. "You're getting close. Just about ten more weeks."

"Thank Circe," he groaned, pushing himself into a seated position. Severus felt beyond bloated, like his body had swollen well past its capacity. As was now his custom, he sat at the edge of the bed, waiting for the sense of vertigo to pass. His vision faded through a series of black dots, clumping together and then bursting open in a soft flash of white.

"All of the baby's senses are developed," Poppy continued from across the room.

"How lovely," he said drolly. Slowly, Severus slipped off the bed, fingers splayed on the edge for a few seconds before he stepped forward, reaching for his shirt. He drew in a deep breath through his nose, fighting back the nausea that swelled in his stomach, pushing upward with each roil.

"Severus . . . are you all right," Poppy asked from somewhere over his shoulder. Admittedly, he was having a bit of trouble buttoning his shirt, the buttons were off somewhere so he charmed them open wordlessly and restarted.

"Hmm? Yes, fine." Severus focused overly much on the task at hand, drawing the open sides of his shirt down until they were even and started buttoning from the bottom up. His thoughts had begun to spin dangerously, so he paid a great deal of attention to buttoning his shirt. His fingers quivered, and Severus simply gripped the shirt and button tighter. There was a slight sway in his shoulders, but he refused to lean against the desk like an invalid.

"Severus. Are you sure you're all right," Poppy asked again, though she sounded very far away. "You look pale, my dear."

He opened his mouth to retort, but the ground seemed to fall out from under him as darkness tinged his vision, approaching much more quickly than he would have liked. There were fleeting moments where he was almost able to open his eyes – when he felt fingers brush his forehead or grip his hand; a wet cloth wiping softly along his face; his name whispered against his skin. But the moments between them were blissfully, silently black.

He could feel the baby twisting in his guts, the walls of his abdomen cramping exceedingly hard. Severus groaned, rolling onto his side just enough to press his face into the pillow.

"Are you finally awake," Minerva's voice came, tone lilting in its soft teasing. "Had enough beauty sleep, have you?"

Severus rolled back over, rubbing a hand callously over his face. "How long was I out." He tried to sit up but found his arms wouldn't hold his weight. Instead, he laid in the bed – miserable.

"Ah well – today is Friday, if that answers the question."

He groaned – four fucking days.

The last time he'd spent four days in the Infirmary had been after a rather long meeting with the Dark Lord and Malfoy Senior wherein things had happened that he tried to forget.

"Tell me you're joking."

"Afraid not, Severus." Minerva moved from the chair at his bedside to sit on the edge of the bed. They stared at each other for a moment, before the older witch spoke again. "I'm surprised to find you alone, actually. Remus has been *rather* attentive. Poppy had to run him out a few times, I'm told."

He snorted. "How insufferable of him."

A long, put-upon sigh. "Yes, well. He cares for you, though Merlin knows why," she teased. Severus gave her a caustic glare and moved to cover his face with the blankets, but there was a subtle shift in Minerva's demeanor – playfulness canting decidedly downward into something more somber.

"What."

A moment of quiet hesitation.

"Albus mentioned your ah, *situation* in the staff meeting," Minerva finally said, her gaze slipping from him to focus on watching her hands smooth the wrinkles in her robes, pulling the fabric tight against her legs.

"What . . ." he spluttered, feeling the anger boil hotly in his chest. "What the fuck," he finally exclaimed, drawing her attention at last, calling Poppy into his room in the back.

"Which is exactly how I told him you'd respond."

Severus planted his hands on the mattress and shoved upward aggressively, pushing his body into a seated position, ignoring the flare of vertigo and nausea that came with the motion. "He had no fucking right," he growled, swinging his legs out from under the blankets and making to get up. Poppy ushered him backward into the bed, pushing at his shoulders as if she could force him back. Minerva helped after a few minutes, and then the sheets tightened around him like a constrictor.

He scowled at the two women, who were tutting over him anxiously. "I'll wring his fucking neck," Severus gasped out.

Minerva reached forward and smoothed his hair in a softly maternal way, "Not until Poppy releases you from the Infirmary, you won't." She cupped Bump gingerly, gave him a smile, and began to head from the room.

"Take good care of him Poppy," she called over her shoulder as she headed out the door. "See you tonight, love."

Severus let out an exasperated sigh while Poppy tutted over him, smoothing blankets and fluffing pillows before checking on Bump and then inspecting what Severus figured must be a considerable gouge in his forehead.

"Care to explain."

"You collapsed. Cracked your head on the corner of the desk on the way down. Unresponsive for a handful of minutes." Poppy's voice had taken on that neutral tone that he had grown familiar with during the Wars – the one that indicated she was trying to withdraw from the severity of the situation. "Rather old hat, Severus. Par for the course."

"The baby," he asked, adopting her tone – as though they were talking about the weather and not a potential catastrophe.

"You *both*," a pointed look, as if trying to remind him of himself, "are fine. I just told Albus I wanted to keep you a few days for observation after you woke up."

"He told the other professors."

"Well that certainly explains the mad scramble to get to your feet after being unconscious." Poppy gave him a wry chuckle. "But, as I mentioned before – at some point a baby will come of this, and how would you explain it away then?"

Severus had just opened his mouth to respond when a stuttering voice piped up from the doorway.

"Ah, he-hello. Good to see you – ah . . . awake."

Poppy gave him a bright smile, completely ignoring the look Severus was giving her that blatantly told her to *not* leave them alone. "I've some labelling to do." She got to her feet, and Severus was nearly overcome by the urge to grab her hand and keep her there. "No vigorous activity, Mister Lupin," she said on her way out the door. And the werewolf blushed, clutching yet another vase of roses to his chest awkwardly.

Severus huffed. "What do you want Lupin." His voice seemed to unstick the lycanthrope's feet, pulling Lupin to his bedside. Some curious emotion itched its way across his skull, something like concern but headier. The roses – six damask this time, all a deep crimson and blown wide open in bloom – were set on his bedside table as Lupin took up the seat Minerva had vacated.

Silence settled heavily, a bit awkwardly over them.

Lupin finally cleared his throat. "Ah, how are you feeling?"

"Incredibly irritated. Haven't you something *better* to do," Severus huffed out.

"It's midmorning break. I always come and check . . ." the werewolf trailed off lamely, rubbing the back of his neck as if suddenly realizing his concern might be unwelcomed.

"Yes. I had heard you've been glued to my bedside," Severus drawled, sneering at the lighter man.

"I was concerned," the werewolf nearly whined, a hazel gaze locking with his. "When Albus mentioned you had collapsed, of course I was."

"This is hardly the first time," he scoffed – and then stilled, suddenly aware of what he had offered up about the pregnancy, but then relieved as Lupin took it in a stride.

"Yes, yes. I know. Spy and all that." Lupin ran fingers through his hair nervously. "But this is decidedly different than wartime, Severus." Fingers curled over his, and there was that cinch of emotion in his chest that he *definitely* wasn't in the mood to deal with. So, Severus tugged them from Lupin's grip.

"So, what exactly did that meddlesome old coot say about me."

Lupin sighed, looking for all the world like he wanted to continue the previous strand of conversation, but allowed himself to be swayed. "He said you were experiencing lightheadedness and would be in the Infirmary for the remainder of the week due to potential complications with your pregnancy."

He really did put it out there, he thought bitterly.

"He told us not to bother you as you were resting. And that he would explain to the students that Potions was cancelled for the week."

Severus rolled his eyes before rubbing a palm over his face. "I'll fucking kill him."

"He didn't mention that its mine, if it helps?"

"You haven't exactly been *subtle* in your advances," Severus gritted out, grinding his teeth anxiously. "They'll all assume it's yours anyway."

Lupin moved to the bed, and Severus did his absolute best to shrink further into the covers. Gentle fingers brushed his forehead, as though checking the healing of the gouge. And Severus absolutely *hated* the almost desperate urge to lean into that touch before he swallowed it away.

"You're not my nursemaid," he managed to get out, batting at Lupin's hand.

"Not this time, no. Poppy would skin me if I tried to take her spot. She's rather protective of you," Lupin said carefully, but there was a sharper emotion scratching at his thoughts. Fingers brushed through his hair, smoothing it from what must have been terrible disarray as the werewolf was the second person to do so in so few hours.

"Jealous, Lupin?" Severus mocked, even as his eyes slipped closed momentarily and he accepted the touch before shying away.

"No." Much too quickly said to be believable. "I'm glad she cares for you. You could have been seriously hurt."

Severus gave a derisive snort. "I'm fine. And Circe knows why she wants to keep me for observation if she's going to leave me in here alone with a damned werewolf to be pawed at." His voice had steadily risen as though he could call Poppy through the open door with his words.

Which, coincidently, was true. As Poppy swept back into his room, assessing the situation and finding it to be nonthreatening, if her smile was anything to go on. "Mister Lupin, classes are about to resume."

Lupin gave a nod and moved to get to his feet. And Severus let out a silent sigh of relief – until a large, warm palm slid along his jaw, taking his breath with it, as Lupin's lips pressed tenderly to his. The pressure was incessant, and while it was chaste, Severus found himself much too warm.

The lycanthrope pulled away, breath hot and damp against Severus's lips. "I'll be back after dinner."

And Severus was too stunned to say differently. Instead, he watched Lupin walk out the door and tried not to let his mouth gape open like a fish. When his mind returned to a functioning state, Severus was painfully aware of the smile Poppy was giving him. He could feel his cheeks flush.

"Not a word," he hissed out – trying his damnedest to glower at her and failing pretty terribly. At least he assumed the expression lacked heat, if her glittering eyes were anything to go on. But thankfully, she pantomimed zipping her lips and bustled out of the room.

31 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a bunch of asparagus

Poppy finally – *finally* – released him from the Infirmary sometime after dinner with the parting words of Bump was the size of a bundle of asparagus, to keep off his feet more, and to try and eat more often or just at all. Severus let out a sigh. His head hurting from the nasty fall had faded and switched to a dull ache from the white-washed stones in the hospital wing, from the incessant pounding of Bump. He felt weak, and verily stumbled the long way down to the Dungeons.

He charmed his way into his rooms, sighing heavily as he staggered in. The door fell shut behind him, and he groaned. Severus tugged at his hair and undid his robes, peeling them off as he wandered into the living room. He rubbed at the back of his neck, scrunching his hands down his sides to knead at his lower back.

"Fuck," he groaned out, fingers kneading harder at sore muscles, but not quite hard enough.

"Only if you think it'll help," came the rather unwelcomed, overly soft voice of Remus Lupin from somewhere just past the doorway of his sitting room. The werewolf exited the kitchenette, carrying a tray of tea items in front of him like a peace offering. Severus's tea as a peace offering to himself. And he scowled, forcing Lupin to abruptly stop.

"Why are you in my rooms."

"Ah well, you see . . ." Lupin started, faltering as Severus continued to glower darkly at him.

"I moved him in, Severus," Albus said brightly, following behind Lupin, carrying a tray of crumpets.

"You had *no* right, Headmaster," he bit out, glaring sharply at the

meddlesome old man, who gave him a twinkling smile back.

"I had every right, Severus. You're one of the best Potion Masters in the Wizarding World; if I were to let you die, I'd have to fill your position with someone far less qualified." Dumbledore settled himself on the couch, wiggling into place and humming as he picked up a crumpet. "Remus, please do bring the tea." A soft reminder to the lycanthrope that he was supposed to be serving rather than standing awkwardly near the door.

Severus stayed where he was, hands resting against his lower back as he regarded them both coolly.

"Besides, I think we have a vested interest in your wellbeing as a whole, Severus. The last twenty years have shown that, have they not," Dumbledore continued gently, as though he could placate Severus with softness as he patted the sofa beside him, leaving Lupin to settle into a chair. And he refused to be called over to the sofa like a pet, and instead continued to stand just inside his sitting room, glaring at the Gryffindor's who had invaded his chambers. Severus sighed heavily through his nose, pressing fingertips to his eyelids as though he could wish them away.

"I'm not in the mood for this idiocy," he warned softly, because as it was – Severus really just wanted to get to bed. His *own* bed. "Take your werewolf and show yourselves out, as you saw yourselves in."

"Remus will be staying here, Severus." The Headmaster sipped at his tea, nibbling a crumpet and blatantly ignored the glare Severus had leveled at him. "You clearly need someone to help you, to take care of you and Bump."

"So, you saw fit to escort a damn werewolf into my chambers. Have you already moved him into my bed, then."

"You opened that door a few months ago," Dumbledore responded coolly, giving him a pointed look that made Severus flush.

"It was a one-time thing," he ground out, lips pursing sourly.

"Regardless, Remus will be staying here, with you, until the baby is

delivered. We're all agreed that this is what's best for you and the baby."

"You're all agreed. I don't want him here. I've managed this long without a babysitter!"

"You collapsed on Poppy and suffered a concussion severe enough that you spent the majority of last week in the Infirmary. How you think you're still managing on your own is *beyond* me," Albus cut in, tone sharper than Severus had heard it in some time. Pursing his lips tightly, Severus glowered at the two of them. Albus blatantly ignored him, while Lupin shot almost concerned looks in his direction.

"I am not a child," he finally said, drawing in a deep breath through his nose as he glared at Dumbledore.

"Severus, please," Lupin finally cut in. "I won't make any advances, I swear. Just . . ." and the lycanthrope fell pitifully silent, looking up at him almost pleadingly. "Let me help."

Albus seemed to take his silence for consent, getting to his feet with a twinkling smile. "Good. Severus, please try not to kill poor Remus here, no poisons or permanent hexes."

He opened his mouth to reprimand the Headmaster, who seemed to be enjoying the situation far more than he should, but the old coot stepped into the fireplace and Floo'ed out of his rooms. Angrily, Severus turned his attention to Lupin, scowling.

"He's a meddlesome duffer," Lupin offered up, voice soft in surrender. "If it's any consolation, I didn't want to invade your rooms like this. Albus essentially just packed some of my clothes and dragged me here . . . more or less."

"More or less," Severus ground out, nostrils flaring as he sneered down at the werewolf, not believing it for a moment.

Lupin sipped his tea awkwardly, gaze decidedly staying away from Severus. "Your rooms are much nicer than mine."

"Head of House has some perks," he replied drolly, finally letting

himself sink onto the sofa. His feet hurt, his legs hurt, his whole damn *body* hurt. Severus rubbed at his left thigh, kneading the muscles roughly, feeling very tired. "Where does he expect you to sleep, hmm. In my bed? Or did he magic you up a pillow by the hearth."

"Ah . . . I don't think he expected we would do much sleeping," Lupin finally intoned, giving Severus the barest hint of a leer.

Severus sighed, giving the lycanthrope a pointed look. "I swear, that man is overly obsessed with my sex life."

The werewolf put his teacup down, returning Severus's pointed look. "Maybe he wants you to be happy. Merlin knows you deserve at least something good every now and again."

"That sounds suspiciously like you're hinting at a good fuck."

Lupin heaved a sigh. "Severus, you're missing the point. Albus just wants you to have more than brewing potions and terrifying students to make you happy."

He rubbed his hand slowly, absentmindedly over the swell of Bump, feeling the baby kick at his palm softly. "He's forgetting the baby."

"The baby can't warm your bed," Lupin replied, which seemed to point toward more fucking, but the look the werewolf was giving him, the soft feelings at the back of his skull pointed toward something more like love and comfort. And Severus hated how tight his chest felt all of a sudden.

"Or. Albus is meddling, and certain Gryffindors have banded together to make my life hell." Severus struggled to his feet. "And you'll sleep on the couch."

Severus left Lupin on the living room as he retired for the evening. He changed into his thick sleep pants, kneaded cocoa butter into Bump's tightly stretched skin, and climbed into bed. As always, it took quite a few impressive maneuvers to situate his stomach even remotely comfortably – which resulted in a pillow wedged between his knees and one wedged under Bump. He draped the afghan

around his hips, up over Bump in an attempt to regulate his temperature before dozing off. As it was, he'd still probably wake up sometime around midnight with stomach acid creeping up his chest. Severus shifted a bit, worming down into his nest of bedclothes and shut his eyes.

As predicted, he woke up sometime around midnight, his chest feeling tight – which was the secondary thought in his mind. The first being that someone was sharing his bed; a hot frame pressed tightly against his back, legs pressing against his, an arm around his chest but resting against the swell of Bump. And upon first waking, it was a pleasant sensation – cradled tenderly back against someone like he *mattered* – until realization sunk in. Because of course, there was only one person it could be, all cozied up to him, and Severus scowled at nothing in particular, trying not to focus overly long on how lovely the clinging werewolf leaving a burn along his skin felt. Instead, he drove his elbow back, feeling the air puff out of Lupin's chest meekly. Groaning, Lupin disentangled himself, leaving Severus feeling very cold.

"What are you doing," he hissed sharply, turning on his side to face Lupin, who was blinking blearily at him.

"Mm?"

"Why the hell are you in my bed," Severus bit out, fighting down the urge to bundle the grey and black afghan around his chest to preserve his dignity like some blushing virgin.

"You were making noises," Lupin said, shrugging a shoulder sheepishly.

He glowered, struggling to sit up a little more so he could glare down at the lycanthrope properly.

"Noises. And what – you thought the blankets had suddenly come alive and were devouring me."

"Like . . . whimpers. S'hard to explain . . . exactly." Lupin rubbed at the back of his neck awkwardly. "You sounded distressed, and it was distressing *me* – or the wolf rather, er both of us?" And if words

could have shrugged, those would have as the werewolf continued. "Not exactly sure." The werewolf's tone was sheepish, gaze not quite meeting Severus's. "Anyway, I came in here – just to check on you, mind, and . . . here we are," Lupin finished lamely, finally meeting his gaze.

"Here we are, indeed."

"Ah . . . I'll just go back to the couch, shall I," Lupin finally offered up, climbing out of bed.

And Severus wasn't too big of a fan of how cold the bed felt minus the werewolf – though he'd never admit it aloud. Instead, he tossed and turned all night, trying to get comfortable when it seemed as though his nest of bedclothes would only offer up the barest of imitated body heat. He pulled the blankets over his head and stared at the fabric in the dark, trying to convince himself to fall back asleep and failing miserably. But finally, Severus just threw off the covers and climbed out of bed, heading for the bathroom and the hottest, longest shower possible.

When he emerged from the bathroom in a cloud of steam, towel slung around his body haphazardly, Severus was greeted with Lupin, who managed to not leer at him despite the hungry look.

"Shall I . . . Floo back to my rooms to get ready then?"

"That would be wise," Severus returned with a scowl, clutching the towel tighter to his chest. They stood there for another moment before Lupin seemed to come back to himself as the lighter man managed a weak smile.

"Right," the werewolf finally managed, gave him one more once-over, and promptly bolted from his bedroom.

Severus made a mental note to leave the bathroom fully dressed in the future and cursed the lack of locks in his rooms. He dried himself quickly and dressed at an even more rapid pace, as though he feared Lupin would burst into his rooms once more. Finally, all buttoned up, Severus headed into the kitchenette to put the kettle on, certain he'd seen the last of Lupin until bedtime.

But Lupin stumbled out of the fireplace, brushing his robes off a little as he stepped past the hearth.

"Why did you put the kettle on," the werewolf asked, entering the kitchen with a curious look on his face.

"Why did you come back," Severus countered, pouring hot water over peppermint tea.

"Albus will expect us to go to the Great Hall together."

Severus hated how much sense that made as he turned to glare at Lupin, sipping his tea. He made a noncommittal noise high in his throat.

"You have to eat sometime," Lupin finally said, leaning against the chair and looking at him almost pitifully – *decidedly* pitifully as a loud rumble broke in around them, echoing up from the werewolf's belly.

"No, *you* have to eat sometime."

Lupin sighed and stepped closer, as though he could convince Severus to be swayed by proximity alone. "Please Severus, I'm starving."

Rolling his eyes, he put his teacup down. "Fine, Lupin."

They managed to exit his rooms precisely as a group of students turned the corner. And Severus fought the urge to cover his face with his hands in defeat. As though it wasn't bad enough to have the werewolf pushed into his rooms, he also had to suffer the humiliation of his students *knowing* that fact.

Ainsley blinked at them in stunned silence before recovering himself. "Ah . . . good morning, Sir." A nod in Lupin's direction. "Professor."

To his credit, the prefect seemed far less stunned than the gaggle of First Years behind him, who all seemed unable to make up their mind of whom to stare at as gazes shifted between himself, Lupin, and Mister Ainsley before making another circuit. Lupin rubbed the

back of his neck awkwardly, looking decidedly uncertain of whether or not he should open his mouth. Which Severus decided was *not* a good idea, and instead took it upon himself to explain.

"Professor Lupin will be staying in my chambers while his rooms are being redone. There's a hole in his roof, and the Headmaster found it humorous to vex me with his *delightful* company," he said drily, managing the appropriate amount of sarcasm that made the statement seem almost believable.

In fact, the First Years seemed to readily believe him. Ainsley, however, didn't look convinced.

"The last storm knocked a weathervane free from the turret nearest my rooms. Knocked a pretty big chunk out of the roof. Water everywhere; complete ruination," Lupin muttered, taking the lie from something small and almost believable to something that could get them into trouble. And Severus fought down the urge to dig his elbow into the other's side to keep Lupin from blathering on further.

Ainsley's attention shifted to Lupin, eying the lighter man as though the prefect was just as happy with a Gryffindor in their midst as Severus was. And as it was, Severus was trying to remember when the last storm had been, hoping that Ainsley wasn't doing the same.

"And you just now noticed," the Fifth Year asked curiously, lips pursing in a way that led Severus to believe it had been at least a week since anything that would make Lupin's lie believable.

"Mind's a bit hazy about this time of the month," Lupin replied with a wolfish grin.

"Mister Ainsley, we can continue this conversation after breakfast if you'd like. However, those First Years are beginning to look a bit peckish," Severus cut in, tone tightly wound as it left his throat.

Ainsley's attention snapped back to Severus, and the prefect recognized the dismissal with a nod. "Right. Yes, Sir. Come along," the dark-haired boy commanded to the younger students, leading them off.

Severus heaved a sigh, leaning back against the doors to his rooms and ignoring Lupin.

"What'll you say if he wants to continue the conversation," the werewolf asked, tone lilting in its humor.

"He won't," he snapped out, pushing himself off the doors and heading toward the Great Hall in a flurry of black robes, Lupin trailing after him.

The next nine weeks, he knew, would be utter hell.

And after three nights of the nonsense – namely Severus waking up sometime around midnight with his chest burning and feeling tight and the lovely surprise of a werewolf being in his bed – Severus decided to take action.

"Lupin."

The lighter man looked up at him from where he sat on the sofa, lap full of marking.

"I'm going to bed. If you're so set on joining me, you will do so *now* and not at midnight."

The silence was almost deafening, as the werewolf peered up at him, blinking slowly. And suddenly, Severus was rethinking the whole thing – which certainly seemed like a more scandalous offer than it truly was. Because as it was, Severus rather enjoyed the other's crippling body heat and the way it soothed the deep-seated aches in his frame. But there was no response forthcoming. And he tried not to feel too embarrassed as Lupin continued to dumbly stare at him. So, Severus merely turned and headed for the bedroom – hating himself for having given in just a little, worn down into something softer than he was clearly made to be. Snatching up his sleep pants, Severus headed into the bathroom to change and get ready for bed, slamming the door behind him. His teeth ground together as he went about tugging off his clothes.

"Someone's in a snit," the mirror quipped, and Severus glowered at it while he angrily brushed his teeth. Spitting into the sink, he

rinsed his mouth and headed for the door.

Which upon opening, revealed a rather meek looking Lupin dressed in well-worn pajamas.

"Sorry – you just . . . surprised me, is all. Does the offer still stand?"

Severus sniffed dismissively, eying the lycanthrope before nodding once and heading toward the bed. Lupin had taken the liberty of transfiguring one the pillows longer, thicker and Severus eyed it as though the lighter man had also given it teeth.

"It's called a body pillow, I believe. Supposed to help you sleep with all that padding round the middle," Lupin muttered, rubbing the back of his neck.

With a huff, Severus moved toward the bed. The house elves had finally taken to *not* messing with his bedclothes – especially given the tongue-lashing he had given to Bilsy the last time he had caught her stripping away his linens – so his nest remained intact. And as it was, he climbed over the wadded-up duvet that served as an outside barrier and fussed overly much with his afghan.

It was a rather odd feeling – being watched overly closely as Severus climbed into bed and wormed his way into the bedclothes, shifting and moving covers until he was satisfied. As it so happened, the body pillow as Lupin had put it, did do wonders, allowing one pillow to do the job of two or three – cushioning Bump and propping his legs open just enough as Severus hugged it. The ache in his hips, the small of his back lessened marginally. He pulled the afghan around his hips, up over Bump just barely while leaving his back uncovered. And to his credit, Lupin waited almost patiently at the bedside until Severus had settled in his nest of covers and ceased all movement – almost because Severus could feel anticipation heavily, headily blanketing the backs of his thoughts.

Slowly, as though he still expected Severus to renege, Lupin crawled into bed.

And it took everything he had to not sigh audibly as Lupin's frame plastered itself to his back, touching everywhere it could and

feeling like a heated blanket. A large hand took up the slow, meandering path of ribs to hip repeatedly, skirting along the swell of Bump and effectively lulling him to that sleepy place Severus wasn't frequenting much anymore.

Of course, the addition of Lupin also made it rather difficult to scramble out of bed without waking the other, not that it mattered as Severus tore off the covers, pushing the pillow to the floor in an attempt to make it to the toilet before retching.

He made it to the sink, hands automatically pulling his hair up as his chest and stomach heaved.

When he finally finished throwing up all he had consumed the previous day and brushed his teeth, Severus crawled back into the suddenly empty bed – though the pillow had been returned, the covers were decidedly lacking a werewolf. And he tried to ignore the rejected feeling that coiled in his chest.

Which was unwarranted it turned out as Lupin returned with tea, climbing back into bed and pulling Severus against his chest once he had handed over the cup. Reluctantly, he sipped at the peppermint tea, the minty taste soothing the lingering nausea that cramped his insides. Lupin's face had buried in the crook of his neck, warm breath skating along his skin in a way that made Severus's fingers clench tighter around the teacup. And he hated how easy it was to relax into the other after all that time.

"Do you feel better," the other asked sleepily as Severus moved to put the teacup on the bedside table.

"Some," he admitted, though suddenly feeling wide awake. He made a show of getting comfortable, as though he could convince his body back to its tired state. Which was not happening as his hormones had kicked back on. Lupin cuddled up to him, breathing out a sigh against his neck while an arm banded across his chest possessively. It didn't take long for the werewolf to fall back asleep.

And Severus was decidedly *awake*.

The situation had seemed a good idea at the time – when he had

only thought of his tired, achy body being warmed. But Severus had managed to overlook the fact that rarely did he sleep through the night. So, what had started as using the werewolf as a heated blanket, rapidly became something . . . else. And as Lupin seemed to impossibly snuggle closer, burying his face firmly against Severus's neck – he decided this had been a very *bad* idea. The soft rasp of facial hair raised goosebumps. The whisper of breath across his skin made him quiver. Want itched itself across his skin while Lupin managed to slumber away peacefully.

Decidedly a bad idea as arousal washed through him, pulling downward with each pound of his heart.

Severus forced his eyes to squint tightly closed, clenching the pillow tightly. He pressed his knees together and pretended he wasn't lying in bed with Lupin getting hard.

Most certainly, the next nine weeks would be the absolute fucking worst.

32 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a squash

"Severus," Lupin started up softly from across the living room where he sat in a wing-backed chair grading.

He didn't bother looking up from his own marking. "What."

"I'd like to go with you to see Poppy."

The request was . . . unexpected to say the least. Shocking Severus into motionlessness, causing him to look up sharply at the werewolf. Who was looking back at him with a sincere gaze. He sniffed, nodding once to indicate he'd heard.

"I'll consider it."

The soft look the lycanthrope was giving him was an entreaty to a softer nature – one that Bump was pushing him toward as the pregnancy wore on.

"Please do. I would like very much to be there." A soft hazy feeling pooling at the back of his thoughts as Lupin continued to smile at him gently.

Of course, the request stayed at the fore of Severus's thoughts for the remainder of the night, making him slightly apprehensive. It made it impossible to sleep – combining with the Braxton Hicks contractions that periodically cramped his guts, the inability to draw in a deep breath, and the soft itch of arousal as Lupin pressed closer to him in bed.

If asked, Severus would never admit to thinking about Lupin's request this much.

But as it was, in the morning as he put the kettle on and Lupin returned from his rooms, Severus spoke softly. "I'll be forgoing

dinner in the Hall this evening." He poured boiling water over his tea.

"Oh?" Lupin leaned against the counter near him, pushing his own empty cup nearer to Severus. He promptly poured the remaining water over the leaves with a sniff.

"It's easiest to visit Poppy while the students are occupied with a meal, rather than to try and make time throughout the day."

"And might I join you?"

"If you're so inclined," he said much softer than he wanted.

He tried to put it out of his mind while he taught his classes – but it was decidedly more difficult than he would have thought. Severus overthought it and overthought it, looking for any reason – aside from the obvious parental one – as to why Lupin would suddenly want to accompany him on a visit with the mediwitch. But he came up blank. Each possible reason he could almost convince himself of was discarded in the end – leaving him only with Lupin wishing to be there as a parent. Which did terrible things to his guts, stirring them into a nervous flutter and leaving him to retch in the laboratory sink after his final class had adjourned.

Severus made his way upward, heading for the Infirmary.

Lupin loitered outside the doors, hands in his pockets, face softened – waiting for him.

"Hello Severus. How was class?"

"We're not here for small talk, Lupin," Severus grumbled, pushing inside the Infirmary.

"Severus," Poppy exclaimed – as she did every week, as though she surprised to see him as he walked through her door and headed for the backroom. "And Remus," Poppy continued, genuine surprise edging her tone. He merely grunted in her direction, heading for the backroom as he left the two of them to exchange pleasantries. And when she finally joined him in the backroom, ushering Lupin with her, she gave him a mild look. Already he was stripping out of

his shirt, his teaching robes laid over the back of a chair. Severus pointedly ignored the way Lupin was watching him and focused on pushing buttons from their holes.

"How are you feeling this week, my dear? Any . . . lingering effects from the fall a couple weeks ago?"

Severus crawled onto the bed, stretching his long body out gingerly as a particularly hard contraction cramped his innards. "No more than usual," he responded, determined to not look at the werewolf, who was standing awkwardly near the door, unsure of where to go.

"Remus, you can go stand by Severus if you'd like. I promise he won't bite."

Thankfully, Lupin didn't respond to that other than to move nearer to the bed, standing level with Severus's shoulder.

Of course, the hot flash of something untoward wasn't what Severus had expected as Poppy put her hands on Bump, her fingers prodding and rolling at his flesh, checking his body for distress. And the feeling – jealousy, it had to be – was choking. It roiled heavily in his thoughts, making his chest tight and nigh impossible for him to draw in a breath. He wheezed out a gasp, glancing upward at Lupin, who's teeth were gritted, jaw tensed in what looked like a very intense attempt to not growl.

The baby twisted hard in his guts, as though awakened by Lupin's feeling. Poppy pulled back to regard him carefully, eyes wide at the clenching she'd no doubt felt.

"Are you all right? The poor dear seems to be in a fit."

Severus gasped in a breath, gritting his teeth. "Fine. Usual cramping." He panted against the hurt, air stuttering over his lips. "Active little bugger. Please continue."

Giving him a look, Poppy resumed her inspection of his body – specifically the tight skin of Bump, the edges of his swollen abdomen where ribs pressed aggressively against his stretched skin. Her touch was nothing but inquisitive – which made the sharp

jealousy even more curious. But it was choking him, sitting heavy in his chest like a living thing – making it decidedly hard to breathe. On instinct, Severus reached up and blindly groped for Lupin's hand, squeezing. The hot burn abated just slightly as fingers curled tightly around his.

"How's your body holding up to the Braxton Hicks contractions? They've not been too severe I hope?" There was that soft spark of magic against his skin – an indication that the visit was nearing its end.

"They come and go. A bit hard to discern them from Bump's cramping, at times. But I have a few blissful moments of peace throughout the day."

A thumb was rubbing slowly over his knuckles, and he felt the clench in his shoulders relax before Severus tugged his hand away from Lupin's. Because it wouldn't do for him to lean into Lupin's affections.

"Long soaks in the tub, Severus," Poppy intoned, hands finally retreating from his skin as she settled at the foot of the bed. "It's the size of a squash; the crushing of your organs is only going to get worse from here. Long, hot soaks in the tub should help some, dear." A soft, affectionate pat to his shin fired the jealous burn up again. Severus struggled to sit up, swinging his legs off the bed.

"The tub is getting rather small," he drawled, tone droll as Severus gave a rather pointed look to the sizeable swell of his abdomen.

"The prefect bathroom has a lovely tub for soaking," Lupin finally said after clearing his throat.

Severus found himself surprised at the werewolf's ability to speak so softly after his little fit of inward emotion. But he merely sniffed in disdain. "Yes. I'm sure the prefects would be most accommodating." He moved to pull his shirt closed, taking his time with his movements. And Severus could feel Poppy watching him closely, as though she was waiting for him to collapse. He charmed his shirt buttons closed and pulled on his heavy teaching robes. A million buttons slipped into their holes with a wordless thought. He

returned his attention to Lupin, scowling.

"Perhaps you skulk in sometime after midnight; after all the lovers have gone to bed," the werewolf intoned, verily leering at him. And Severus was overly aware of Poppy watching the exchange between them curiously, certain that she would relay it all back to Minerva with a sense of glee.

"I do not skulk."

He hurried to leave, uncertain as the werewolf matched his stride. Severus could feel it – the itching, aching burn of lingering, untoward emotions wafting off Lupin like steam.

"Severus," Lupin started in, fingers curling around his forearm.

"Don't." As he tried to tug his arm free, knowing exactly what kind of downward spiral it was.

They'd barely made it through the door before Lupin was crushing against him, kissing him heavily – all teeth and tongue, fingers in his hair, pressing him back against the wall. His knees nearly buckled with want; a reedy moan trapped in his overly tight chest while his fingers clutched at Lupin's robes. Leftover emotions lit up his thoughts like a wildfire, jealous and all encompassing. The lycanthrope was growling softly, mouth roaming his skin possessively.

"Lupin," he finally bit out, word softened with the sonances of a moan, his hips jerking as Lupin's hands curled around the sharp juts of bone, crushing their bodies together as closely as Bump would allow. "Just a checkup." Severus was gasping, his fingers knotted in Lupin's robes, a hand finding itself in those greying locks. There was a deep breath drawn in against his skin, the soft spot at his jaw followed by teeth and lips.

"Fucking drove me insane," the lighter man groaned, face buried in the crook of Severus's neck. "Her touching you."

"Yes," he managed to gasp out. "I know." A soft whimper he wouldn't ever admit to breathing into existence as a hot mouth

trailed slowly along his throat. "I am *quite* aware."

Lupin's hips canted to his, sharp teeth nipping at his neck. And Severus told himself it was just the looming moon that had the werewolf all out of sorts.

"Oh," a hot voice whispered in his ear, and Severus tried not to quiver overmuch. An arm wound its way across his lower back, keeping their bodies close. A huff of breath against his skin. "Are apologies in order?"

"I thought you were going to start snarling," Severus managed, with a huff of a not-quite laugh. Lips smeared a hot path up his neck, along his jaw. And it would be so easy to sink into that heady pool of want, to just let the lycanthrope give them what they both apparently wanted – even if it was only skin deep, only for a night.

"Is that why you held my hand." A soft nibble to his jawbone before Lupin pressed his forehead to the long line of Severus's throat.

"Couldn't have you maiming Poppy," he bit out with as much snark as he could manage given the situation. Because the feel of Lupin bracketing him to the door had seemingly melted all his bones and made him a puddle of goo. "She is rather consequential in this whole matter."

Lupin's lips slotted against his in a decidedly gentler but more passionate kiss. Fingers wound their way into Severus's hair, the arm against his back pulling him closer as the lycanthrope curved to accommodate Bump and further the kiss. Teeth nipped Severus's bottom lip, soothed by the hot rasp of a tongue and eliciting a gasp. Said tongue pushing in to map every inch of his mouth. And it was impossible not to reciprocate, as arousal made his skin hum and his fingers knot in fabric and hair.

The whimper wasn't his, Severus told himself as Lupin moved impossibly closer, deepening the kiss, leaving them to gasp in air through their noses as the lycanthrope made it apparently clear he wouldn't be relinquishing Severus's mouth anytime soon. Severus let himself sink into that soft haze of want, arching up into the werewolf, quivering as a hand ran along his flank, rucking up his

shirt.

However, it was the thigh that wormed its way between his legs – the thigh he unintentionally ground down on – that broke the situation open.

He used the fingers in Lupin's greying hair to pull the other back, breaking open air between them and leaving them both panting. The sound of it echoing wetly off the stone walls of his living room. He gritted his teeth, pushing at the other's chest until Lupin stepped away, looking reluctant and wanting. Pushing his fingers through his own hair, smoothing down the strands that Lupin's strong hands had tugged into disarray, Severus drew in a deep breath. And then another. His hands were shaking, and he absolutely refused to look up at the lycanthrope; preferring to pretend the other no longer existed, even as Lupin cleared his throat.

"Shall I, ah – put the kettle on . . . then," Lupin asked softly, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly.

Not exactly trusting himself to speak, Severus nodded once and headed for the bedroom to change.

33 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a head of celery

If anyone ever asked – and they wouldn't, if they valued their personal safety – Severus would blame the entire thing on pregnancy brain.

As it was, he was lucky if his attitude was a quarter amount of the scathing he used to possess, so it wasn't that big of a shock that he would forget more important things – such as the lunar cycle and what followed it, even as he brewed the damned potion. His hand splayed on his stomach to mask his irritation, mostly at himself because he *should* have seen it coming and should have made accommodations for it. But Bump was decidedly making his mind a little soft.

"I can . . . go back to my rooms," Lupin offered, looking just as miserable as Severus felt because they were in a somewhat dangerous predicament.

While the Wolfsbane *should* keep Lupin a mild-mannered wolf, there were always *what-ifs* involved.

"There's not enough time, Lupin. Surely you know that. Even if you were to Floo, there's a chance you'd change in the middle of it." Heaving a much put-upon sigh, Severus pinched the bridge of his nose as his other hand splayed on Bump protectively. Already nerves were roiling in his guts, his saliva glands kicking up a fuss.

"You'll lock yourself in the bathroom."

"What if you need it? You use the bathroom quite a bit Severus," the werewolf mumbled, running his hands nervously through his hair.

"I've a washroom off my private lab. I can use that if I need." Severus began pushing the lighter man toward the bathroom, muttering *nox* so the mirror wouldn't see. Because the last thing he

needed was that damn enchanted glass getting involved, and they'd been rather lucky so far. The door shut heavily behind Lupin, and Severus found himself scrambling for the kitchen.

He grasped the edges of the sink, his whole-body curving with the force of the retch. Tears prickled just under his lashes, and Severus ignored them as they crawled lethargically down his cheeks. He retched until his stomach was empty, until his throat was raw, until there was blood and bile-thick spit in the sink. Leaning back, Severus sucked in as deep a breath he could, smelling the soured tea and bile scent in his nostrils, tasting it at the back of his tongue. He turned on the faucet and sucked in great mouthfuls of water, letting the cold liquid torrent from waxy lips. Hurting, he made his way back to bed. Severus crawled into his nest of bedclothes, trying not to focus on how empty and cold the bed felt. He stared at the bathroom door, feeling very exhausted and more so apprehensive.

Of course, after the moon rose and Lupin had succumbed to its call, the sucking, popping, breaking sounds having echoed dully in the bathroom – it was impossible for Severus to sleep. Sleeping, as it was, had become a novelty anyway, but even more so with a fucking werewolf trapped inside his chambers. Instead, Severus laid on his side, watching the closed bathroom door while his hand idly rubbed Bump.

There came a high-pitched whine, and the scrabble of sharp nails scratching at the bathroom door.

"No Lupin," Severus ground out, feeling the baby twist in his guts, as if called awake by Lupin's actions. He kneaded the swell of his stomach, humming softly under his breath as he tried to soothe the baby.

Silence for a moment, and Severus watched the arms of the clock twitch by, counting the seconds as they passed. He wished for some blended malt to pass the time; the old tradition put on hold. Instead, Severus swept his hand along his side, feeling the furrows of his ribs, the taunt swell of Bump, the shallowed cut of his hip before his hand drifted back upward to follow the path again.

Fifteen minutes came and went – droplets of time in the dark pool

of the night – before the whine came again, nails scratching incessantly at the door.

"No," Severus said much louder, his palm pushing at Bump more firmly as he tried to soothe the sharp contractions in his guts, trying to suck in a deep enough breath.

But the whining became a sharp yip as nails scrabbled at the door once more. The sound hollowed out into a low whine. And for all intents and purposes, the creature just on the other side of the bathroom door *decidedly* did not sound like a dark and dangerous beast as there came another yip – softer that time before it wavered out into whining. Severus ignored the noises from the bathroom. Instead he lay on his back and rubbed his stomach softly. There was a roiling in his guts, his saliva glands once more drooling but he told himself he had nothing left to give – that Bump would allow the nausea to be abated with soft touches.

Which was untrue, as sickness cramped sharply in his guts, forcing Severus upward. His feet tangled in the blankets, and he just barely managed to catch the edge of the bed, slowing his descent to the floor into a sluggish downward fold. But still, his knee banged heavily into the bedside table as he pulled the bedclothes with him. He retched on the floor, blood and bile strung together with spit dribbled meekly from pried wide lips. The subsequent barking was sharp and incessant; nails gouging at the wood. And he struggled to his feet. His arms trembled as he wiped at his lips with the back of his hand, smearing any lingering sickness on his skin. Severus yanked the door open.

"What? What the devil do you want?" He was shouting, hands knotted into fists as the wolf peered up at him, tongue lolled out from black lips. Severus received soft whine for his troubles, as a cold nose rubbed along the swell of his bare belly. Suddenly exhausted, Severus sighed, rubbing a hand over his face tiredly. "I need to sleep, Lupin."

The wolf had crept into the bedroom and was inspecting the pile of sick on the floor, whining – its ears flat against its skull, tail curled between its legs. Severus did away with it, feeling worn down as he stared at that supposed *monster* in his rooms.

"If you insist on remaining in my room, I'll not have you pissing on my rug." Severus edged around the wolf, ignoring that trickle of fear that had bubbled up in his chest as he returned his covers to the mattress and climbed into bed. He made a show of fixing the nest as he pushed the blankets into a more acceptable shape, before plumping pillows and situating them just so. The mattress gave slightly as the wolf bounded nimbly onto the bed; peculiar eyes regarded him quietly, ears pricking forward sharply as if in question. And Severus half expected Lupin to roll over onto his back, exposing his soft belly in a wiggling squirm. Instead, the lycanthrope crept to his side – completely stealing Severus's breath. He knotted his fingers in the bedclothes to still their shaking.

While they had certainly come a long way since 1976, or even 1994 for that matter – it was still terrifying in a way that Voldemort had never managed to be. This was still the same creature which had nearly torn him limb from limb – twice. That had crowded him against a worn, gouged door and snarled, jaws open and gleaming with slobber; that had nearly cornered him out there on the lawn, its golden eyes narrowed to something much more dangerous and feral than mild-mannered Remus Lupin had ever seemed capable of. But the soft whine, the rough tongue rasping across Bump seemingly washed that all away as a heavy skull coming to rest gingerly on his chest.

Sleep might have been a possibility once – with Lupin locked securely away in the bathroom. But currently, with the large beast curled up in bed with him, it was absolutely impossible.

A heavy canine skull rubbed closer, nose tilting upward to press coldly against the hollow of his throat, and Severus knew Lupin was definitely smelling him. There was the soft thump of a heavy tail against the bedclothes, muffled but rhythmic. There came another soft whine, and Severus lifted a hand, slipping his palm along the almost silky fur of the skull. His fingers wound their way into the thick ruff at the nape of the wolf's neck. A huff of breath against his throat as Lupin settled in against him. As he resigned himself to yet another sleepless night, Severus watched the hazy shadows creep across the high ceiling of his bedroom. He tried to ignore the easy peace in his gut, as though Bump had finally fallen asleep. Instead,

he counted the seconds, minutes, hours until sunrise. His eyes felt gritted with sand, sleep lingering just at the corners of his lashes, sticking but never falling, never pulling him under.

The body next to him shifted, all the muscles in the wolf tightening with a high whine. Severus closed his eyes tightly against the snapping, grinding, popping sound – the moon's curse sucking itself from Lupin's body. The wolf whimpering – turning to the man groaning. He tried to slip from the bed. But Lupin's arm banded around his chest. The lighter man, covered in gore from the change, bundled as closely as he could. Soft kisses peppered along his skin.

"Thank you," the other croaked out, placing more persistent kisses along the sharp cut of his collarbone, the long line of his throat.

"You're making a mess of the bed, Lupin," he rasped out.

"Ah . . . right, sorry."

A *scourgify* whispered into the quiet of the room as Lupin stumbled from the bed, back into the dark bathroom. Severus drew in a shuddering breath, glad to have made it through the night as he heard the shower start up. He was beyond exhausted as he shifted in the bedclothes, wallowing further into the warmth and allowing his eyes to drift closed. While he wouldn't be able to get a full night's sleep, he never did, Severus was content knowing he'd be able to doze long enough for it to count as a catnap.

There was silence in the bathroom, and then the mattress dipping. The bedclothes he had spent so much time adjusting were moved, and Severus found himself bundled against the werewolf's bare chest as clothed legs tangled with his. The contact was entirely too intimate – normally the smothering heat of the lighter man was plastered to his back. He could feel the thump of Lupin's heart, lulling his into the same steady beat. And the position was entirely too much like a lover's embrace – especially in light of the intimate situation he had just privy too. But still Severus couldn't find it in himself to push away from being tucked into the fold of the werewolf's body like something precious.

Lupin's fingers pushed gingerly into his hair, tucking Severus's head

in under his chin. Severus found himself too tired to really try and fight the shaking strength of the werewolf. Instead, he focused on the scent of Severus's soap on Lupin's skin and the soft feeling of contentment that settled along his thoughts as the heat of the other steeping down into him.

"Merlin – took you long enough to open the door," came the soft voice, Lupin's throat vibrating with his words. "I heard you fall; had me worked into a frenzy." A broad hand began the long, slow sweep of his back, trailing along his spine. Severus made a soft noise in his throat, already feeling the sleepiness creeping in around the edges of his consciousness.

"Locked in your bathroom – where all I could smell was you, the things for our baby." The soft smear of lips along his ear, a nose pressing into his hair.

Severus sighed, letting the contentment pull him along toward sleep. It left him wrapped up in a warm haze, even if it was only because Lupin was in close proximity to Bump as the werewolf's body curved to accommodate the sizeable swell of his stomach. The touch continued to smooth along his back, fingers dancing along his spine as though Lupin were counting vertebrae.

"Wanted so badly to be with you. Always want to be with you." The tone was softer, barely audible as Severus drifted in that not-quite conscious place. "Having you in my bed, sharing my warmth." The arm tightened, pulling Severus closer while the hot exhale breathed through his hair. "It's all I want anymore. I spend all day looking forward to bedtime; to crawling into bed after you, holding you close."

A soft kiss he barely felt.

"This is perfect," said so whisper-soft that Severus could pretend he had dreamed it as sleep finally claimed him.

34 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a butternut squash

Of course, as he took tea with the two lovebirds the following week and recounted his harrowing tale, Minerva gave him a quick once over while she poured the tea with a wry smile. "You don't look as though you've spent a night with a murderous werewolf. Look at you, Severus. Not even a love nip!"

He rolled his eyes and sighed down at his peppermint tea, already regretting telling them about his faux pas as he watched the pearled leaves unfurling slowly as the hot water seeped into them. As it was, Severus was still trying to convince himself that he had dreamed up those perhaps breathed-out words, whispered into the silence that had followed the moon's curse sucking itself sharply from Lupin's bones. Briefly, he thought back to the situation which he could have clearly dreamed up, mind well exhausted beyond logical thought. Warm arms wrapped around him, holding him close while soft words whispered in his ear, followed by softer touches whispered against his skin.

He was trying rather hard to *not* let that bloom into emotions.

"Yes. I imagine Albus didn't take *that* into consideration when he locked Lupin in my rooms," he quipped sharply and most certainly did *not* huff. Severus fought the urge to fold his arms in front of his chest. Instead, he lifted his teacup and sipped at the still scalding liquid as he settled back in his chair.

"He knows you've more lives than a bloody cat," Poppy said with a snort. "Knew better than to expect you to perish all because of a too-amorous werewolf. And how do you just *forget* that anyway."

"I can barely keep my marking straight, let alone be held responsible for the side effects of the full moon," he scoffed. "*You* were the one who said *pregnancy brain* was a real thing; I just didn't think it would affect *both* of us. Not to mention my hormones are

currently enough of a handful without mixing them with Lupin's." He sighed, rubbing a hand along his forehead. "I'll just glad when he's out of my hair."

Poppy nearly choked, shooting a look in Minerva's direction . . . and making Severus feel as though he had missed something very important along the way. Or more likely, a certain old man had forgotten to tell him. Groaning, Severus slapped a hand over his face and huffed out a breath. "Oh, don't tell me. Albus has decided Lupin and I are to be wed. He's found another way to twist my arm and get me to do as he wishes. Picked out the rings, venue, and all that, has he?"

Minerva cleared her throat. "Well, he's certainly taking liberties with you missing out on the staff meetings."

He snorted, resigning himself to being in the dark about Dumbledore's plans up until the very moment he was finally privy to it. "He's daft, you know."

"He's certainly *something*," Minerva huffed out, sipping her tea.

And Severus wanted to trash the tea set – because Dumbledore's latest, yet to be seen betrayal felt finite. Carved of stone, burned into the pages of their history together. He pinched at the bridge of his nose, drew in a deep breath, and counted backward from ten. And instead of lingering there in a muted sense of his own betrayal, Severus sucked in another deep breath and got to his feet.

"I think I will retire," he told them softly, but surely as he smoothed his robes down.

"Severus," Poppy started, giving him a look. But Severus shook his head, ready to head for the sanctity of his rooms.

The walk from the Infirmary to the Dungeons was quiet, filled with too much silence but Severus let it be. He let the silence of the halls be filled up with that quietness, splintered with the sharp staccato of his steps.

And the rooms were just as quiet – Lupin still taking his tea with

Dumbledore, he was sure.

Feeling broken away from all sense of things, he charmed his robed open and left them over the back of the sofa. And in the bedroom, he continued to pluck at his clothes, stripping down to his waist before stopping. His stomach stretched grotesquely in front of him, a swell of flesh rising from bone – as unforgiving as a crag from the sea. His breath caught in his throat, a soft displeased sound rising there, as he stared down at his body, ran palms over the swell of his belly. Over the too-much thereness of himself.

Severus blinked slowly and pushed himself through that feeling of despair, considered it to be only nausea as he traded his trousers for more forgiving sleep pants. The fabric was soft against his worn-thin skin, against the aches of thirty-four weeks of pregnancy managed to bring. Already that nausea was becoming a bone-crushing thing, mounting at the hollow just behind his ribs and pushing at his stomach. He blinked against it, unwilling to succumb to that hurt until it proved itself to be too much.

And in the bathroom, Severus unscrewed the jar lid. His nostrils flared in agitation as the mirror crooned behind him, reminding him of himself. "Oh love, always told you you'd look so much *better* with a bit of meat on your bones. Look at you now, so lovely."

A sharp cramp tore at his guts, and Severus drew in a quivering breath. "I would wager this is *too* much meat," he snipped. His hands shook a little as he dipped fingers into the jar. It took everything he had to lock his knees, to keep himself from spilling to the floor with a whimper.

"Severus," Lupin called from the doorway, soft and teasing – he squinted his eyes shut, just another distraction he didn't need. "Are . . . are you worried about stretch marks?"

The soft voice effectively drew the mirror's attention off him, as it gave a little cry of happiness. "Oh, and there's the other one. I was so *very* curious as to when he would be moving in." If the damned piece of glass had had eyebrows, Severus was sure they would be wiggling suggestively at the tone.

Lupin's voice was right off his shoulder the next time he said his name, fingertips touching his elbow gently. "Severus?"

He wondered if Lupin could feel the tiny tremors tracing the bones in his arms. "For Circe's sake no, Lupin; I already have them." Severus managed to bite out, even though they still bothered him more than he would have liked, as his hand rested against Bump carefully. "It's just ah, Bump is rather good at keeping my guts twisted. Touching calms the baby; the nausea abates slightly." He made a vague motion in the air between them as if that explained everything.

"Bed, then?" The lycanthrope's tone was soft, and Severus felt his entire face pale sickly and then flush hot. The mirror whistled sharply, wolfishly – it fit – and Severus was sorely tempted to hex it. Only then did he notice that Lupin had gathered up the jar of cocoa butter before he let the lighter man steer him toward the bedroom.

"I assure you; I am quite capable of doing this without a *werewolf* pawing at me," he nearly sneered, trying to bundle himself up in acrid words and failing. Especially given that he was letting Lupin ease him back on the bed. And Severus suddenly wished he was wearing more than soft cotton pajama pants because the whole letting the werewolf touch him thing seemed like a disaster in the making.

"Hmm, I know. Just let me take care of you. It's why Dumbledore moved me in here, right? To take care of you. Well you and Bump," Lupin amended quickly, settling himself at the foot of the bed and pulling Severus's foot into his lap. The jar of butter rested against the werewolf's knee, fingers dipping into the thick substance and smearing it across Severus's sole.

"Lupin," he said quickly as he jerked to pull his foot free, even as Lupin's fingers tightened further as if holding him in place and curious eyes lifted to his. The static at the back of his skull offered up devotion again, as Lupin was wont to feel around Bump, and Severus let his leg relax. It was a mistake, he was *sure* of it, but it would be a pleasurable one at least as he settled back against the pillows.

"Your feet must be tired after teaching all day. Wish you'd take Dumbledore up on his offer, take some time off."

Severus huffed out a soft sound as blunt fingers and strong thumbs pushed against his skin – reminding him of just how much his feet hurt after eight hours on a hard, stone floor teaching. Knots in his sole worked themselves free under Lupin's ministrations. His shoulders slumped marginally.

"I am not an *invalid*, contrary to the Headmaster's belief," he breathed out. The delicate bones in his feet were shifting under Lupin's touch, the ache in them soothed. Lupin had the audacity to hum as he switched to the other foot, giving it the same careful attention. "Of course, if any of those brats had the capability of brewing a halfway decent potion, I could sit at my desk. Instead, I have to police them or they'll blow up the damn Dungeons."

A breath of a laugh as hands pushed at his sleep pants, rubbing roughly at ankles and calves. "Hermoine would be more than adequate as a substitute. She'd like to help."

He made a noncommittal noise in the back of his throat, which abruptly choked him as Lupin moved, verily crawling up the bed. And *that* bolted arousal down into his guts for whatever reason because there hadn't been anything sexual in the way Lupin approached him. Widespread thighs flanked his knees as a heavy touch bore down on his thighs, carefully chaste as fingers rolled the femur bones, rubbing at weary muscles. Severus was tempted, if only very shortly, to let himself collapse back into the pillows and to give himself over to that delightfully heavy touch. But then those warm, strong hands were gone. And suddenly Severus found himself reminded of the situation as he peered up at the other.

"Sit up, Severus."

And hesitantly, he did. Lupin scooted in behind him, a leg outstretched on either side of Severus. Broad, warm palms swept from shoulder to elbow.

"Hold your hair up, dear," Lupin said softly, humming just a bit as he collected more of the lotion on his fingers.

Severus nearly reprimanded the other but was pitifully grateful to have something to do with his hands. His fingers twisted and pulled at his hair, piling it on top of his skull. He was grateful that his elbows created somewhat of a sharp cage around his face to keep him from feeling too exposed. Lupin's hand squeezed the back of his neck, thoroughly shocking him before both hands were working steadily at his neck, thumbs pressing on either side of his spine. Hands moved to his shoulders, his upper back, rubbing along his spine.

Bump had, for the time being at least, fallen still. The nausea abated. Lupin's static at the back of his mind was *warm*. Hot really, burning away his thoughts and higher brain functions. And Severus could feel the wanting in it, even if Lupin was behaving himself, letting him relax. So, he gave over and relaxed into that comforting heat at his back, the strong hands on his skin, the easiness of his stomach. Hands roamed over his back, palmed along his ribs, rubbed along the top curve of Bump, then moved back to the tender spots along his spine.

It was an instinct really, just to sigh and moan his appreciation at the feeling of knots being worked free, to push back against those hands. To groan a little louder when Lupin pressed and rubbed particularly hard at a spot just under his left shoulder blade. And Severus couldn't even make himself feel the slightest bit embarrassed as arousal collected in the pit of his stomach. Right up until the moment it was made apparent to the lighter man, the lycanthrope's forearm brushing his erection as Lupin rubbed lotion along the swell of Bump.

"Severus," Lupin started in.

"Lupin," he countered, voice much too reedy as his fingers curled sharply around Lupin's wrist. Because his heart was pounding against his breastbone, making itself known in the thunder of his pulse. And those *fucking hormones* were sparking along his nerves impatiently.

"I can . . ." the werewolf continued, tone breathy with want.

And Severus couldn't help the soft, needy noise that punched out of

him – something suspiciously like *please* – as his hips tipped upward, pulled along by hormones that were apparently unwilling to be ignored any longer. Lupin's fingers ghosted along his erection in the all-too-thin pants. But then the broad hand was slipping between the soft cotton and his overly hot skin, wringing yet another embarrassing noise out of Severus's throat. And he fell back into Lupin's chest as fingers twisted against his tip, pulled along the first few inches, and a broad thumbpad rubbed maddeningly slow against the slit. Severus was blushing, he knew, as he felt precum dribble and soak the fabric where it bunched obscenely over the other's hand. Lupin merely kept rubbing his thumb over the head, wringing more moisture from him and driving him mad.

Lupin folded fully against his back, face pressing heavily into the crook of his neck, and Severus shuddered a bit. Of course, Lupin was hard. But it was an entirely thing to assume he was, given the hazy static at the back of his mind, and to actually feel the werewolf pushed against him tightly enough he could feel the twitching length pressed against his lower back. Want pushed down into him, jerking his hips up into that not-quite enough touch.

"Lupin," he gasped out, his arm folding back so his fingers could curl sharply in the werewolf's greying hair as Lupin's lips opened, hot breath panted against his neck. Severus arched back into the feel of teeth on his skin, hips rocking up at the scrape.

"Just consider it pregnancy hormones," Lupin breathed against his neck, fingers still working. It was a maddening slow pace, but after so many nights of feeling like he was going to crawl out of his damn skin with *want* it was working far too well. Fingers squeezed, stroking with a surety that did its best to render Severus speechless.

"Have you been *reading*," he managed to groan, heat settling firmly in his lower stomach like warm lead and pulling tight. He wasn't going to last long, Severus knew. That thumb was back, rubbing firmly against his head, the nail pulling lightly along his slit.

"Course, new dad and all. Trying to make it a good experience for you," Lupin rasped out, face buried in his neck, teeth ghosting along the sensitive skin there.

Blushing, Severus opened his mouth to retort, but a particularly good rub made the hand curled around the werewolf's wrist drop to grip at Lupin's thigh, fingers tightening the other man's hair and pulling with a gasp. He panted, hips squirming as the werewolf's ministrations pushed him further along – orgasm just out of reach but fast approaching. His back bowed, hair falling to curtain around his face as his hips rocked upward. And Lupin's free hand swept his hair away, tugging softly as teeth and tongue swept against the taunt skin of his neck. Severus moaned, nails scrabbling at Lupin's pants, at the strong muscles just underneath. The moan turned into a soft keen, his hips jerking against a particularly hard squeeze, pulled along with a particularly hard bite.

He fell apart, split at the seams. The mouth at his neck gentled, Lupin softly kissing along the column of sensitive skin. Severus quivered finely, embarrassed at the whole thing, really. Lupin's hand still rested at that damp place between his legs, hard body and harder prick still pressed against his back.

It'd been *quite* some time since he'd cum in his pants like a Second Year.

"Lupin," he panted, syllables strung together by the shudder of a moan. That mouth was distracting.

"Think I've earned the right for you to call me Remus, now." Teeth closed over his earlobe, worrying the soft skin there before the lycanthrope pressed his temple to Severus's cheek. The hand in his pants pulled out, and Severus winced at the mess.

"Ah – yes. Well, Lu-Remus. Ah. What about you?" And his words failed him miserably. He really wanted to push on that furred chest and demand to know exactly what the *fuck* the other was getting at. But his heart was doing something complicated behind the bones of his chest and his breathing was still ragged and low.

"Oh. Ah – ah, right, I'll be back." While it hadn't been the end result he expected from Lupin – *Remus* his mind reminded him – it was oddly welcome as the werewolf peeled himself from Severus's back and disappeared into the bathroom. He could hear muffled compliments from the leering mirror, and he rolled his eyes. Pulling

himself from the bed, where the crotch of his pajamas had cooled rather quickly, he changed his clothes with a grimace. The *scourgify* left the skin of his groin clean, tingling as the magic whispered against still sensitive bits. He pulled on another set of soft pants and headed back to bed, feeling oddly sated. His heart pounded loudly in his ears as his body came back to itself – the orgasm making just enough space in the hollows of his bones for pleasantly exhausted, pushing aside the ever-present nausea if only for that moment.

Collapsing back on the rumpled bedcovers, Severus ran his hands along Bump, applying just the right amount of pressure as he rolled on his side – cupping the swell of his stomach, kneading the skin automatically as sleepiness stuck together his thoughts, slowed him. His eyes shut, perpetually exhausted. The ache, the sickness – it made it hard for him to rest, for him to sleep. He heaved another sigh. But in that moment, Severus felt delightfully drowsy.

"Severus," Lu-Remus called from the doorway, voice anxiously high. "You all right?"

"Tired," he muttered, a mere whimper of a word. The bed shifted behind him, and the werewolf's almost unbearably hot body plastered itself to his back. An arm came around him, fingers slotted through his where they cupped against Bump.

Remus nosed along his neck, sighed at the soft place just behind his ear. "A nap, then." A tender declaration followed by a gentle hum as the other moved both their hands over the taunt skin of his belly – the touch soothing Bump by wide degrees.

"Yes, I think," he said, letting himself be lulled by the soft words, the softer touch, and the heavy thrum of contentedness at the back of his thoughts.

35 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a pineapple

Severus took tea with Poppy and Minerva in Poppy's office, the three of them crowded around the mediwitch's desk, cradling teacups in their palms.

"You're looking rather . . . well rested," the older professor quipped, the very corners of her lips quirking upward in an almost coy smile.

"Worn down rather," he ground out, shooting her a look because her insinuations were quite apparent. "But grateful that I have been given leave of those damnable staff meetings."

Minerva cackled, giving him a look. "Albus knows how to pick his battles with you."

He shot her a look over the thin rim of his cup but said nothing.

"Speaking of Albus," Poppy started in, placing her teacup down on the desk and giving him a pointed look. He held up his hand in a valiant effort to cut her off before she spouted drivel he had already been hearing from Remus as well as Albus himself.

"I don't care to hear it."

"It will be heard, though," Minerva cut in, giving him a steely look he remembered from his youth. "He's very concerned about you, you know. You *and* the baby." The Gryffindor looked to Poppy for support. "How big did you say the little one was now?"

"The size of a pineapple," Poppy said lightly, picking up her teacup and deferring to the more aggressive woman, as though the mediwitch expected Severus would do far better with some verbal manhandling than coddling at the current point.

"You've got a bloody pineapple crushing your insides and you

petulantly remain on your feet all day, hiding away in your Dungeons. Filius and Pomona ask after you. Even more so *now* that they know your condition; that the werewolf has taken up in your rooms." She leaned forward, her bony fingers curving over his forearm. "Everyone is worried. Just take Albus up on his offer for an extended maternity leave."

Severus reeled backward; lips drawn in a tight snarl. "Everyone is worried *now* – a hapless child in the care of cruel, bullying Snape."

Poppy snorted, eyeroll implied. "Severus, we all know that Filius and Pomona, none of the others *knew* about the full extent of your efforts in the war. And yes, you can be a bit of a bully, but that's beside the point." The mediwitch purposely poured yet another round of tea for all of them, giving him a look.

"Yes, you're glowing; there's decidedly something different about you. But you still look dead on your feet half the time; you don't eat. Of *course,* your colleagues are worried about you."

Huffing out a deep breath, Severus picked up his teacup and took a sip. Yes, admittedly, he had been evading his coworkers. To have his secret outed by Albus, with blatant disregard – as usual – left him feeling more . . . vulnerable then he would have liked.

And Severus Snape did *not* do vulnerable.

"Perhaps we have a small get-together, all us staff. Give them all the chance to air out demons or what have you," Minerva said, gesturing vaguely while she added copious amounts of sugar to her tea. And Severus was pleased to see that someone liked chamomile tea as much as he did, her nose crinkling up at the aggressive floral note. But unlike Minerva, sugar would just further serve to upset his stomach, so he was forced to deal with the floral notes undoctored. Severus splayed a hand on Bump, rubbing tight circles in thought.

"Fine," Severus replied, taking one last sip of his tea before abandoning it on Poppy's desk. "I think it's utter rubbish and completely pointless but do what you will," he spat.

The two women beamed up at him, seemingly oblivious to his

discomfort as he fled the office.

In his rooms, Remus lounged on the sofa, looking up cautiously as he burst through the door, shucking off his heavy teaching robes and concealment spell alike.

"Careful love, you'll distress yourself."

"I told you not to call me that," he scoffed, glaring at the werewolf, who merely peered back in befuddled amusement as the corners of his lips tilted upward in an almost smile.

"All right, what's wrong," Remus asked, sitting up on the sofa in interest. "Something's got you in a tiff."

"Minerva wants to have a party with all the staff to discuss my situation," Severus finally managed, feeling utterly miserable as he folded himself onto the couch near the werewolf – comforted briefly by the other's proximity before reminding himself that that wasn't acceptable. He fought the urge to bundle himself off to bed and hide under the covers as the body dysmorphia reared its head. Because as it was, Poppy, Minerva, Albus, and even Remus to some extent had all seen his stomach, had watched it grow. The other staff had not and as such, there could only be extreme reactions to his body having turned from thin and trim to the bloated, swollen thing it had become.

Remus wrapped his arms around Severus, but he shook the touch off, scowling petulantly.

"Do *not* presume to coddle me," Severus ground out, eyes narrowed at the werewolf as his palm smoothed down Bump mindlessly. As it was, the touch to his swollen stomach soothed him just as much as it soothed the baby anymore.

Fingers gently touched his elbow, pulling him more firmly onto the couch as Remus got to his feet, making more room for Severus to lay down. "Just lay down; I'll put the kettle on, and you can tell me all about it."

Severus let himself be eased back into the sofa cushions; Remus's

hands on his biceps until he settled against the arm of the couch. The touch was withdrawn, and the werewolf retreated to the kitchenette to do as he said he would and put the kettle on. "Not much to tell. Albus just feels – in his infinite wisdom – that we have a party for the other staff, let them air their demons and what not," he spoke to the empty room, knowing Remus could hear him. There was clattering in the kitchenette, and Severus pulled himself into a seated position as the nausea stirred to life behind his navel.

"So . . . perhaps it's for the best," Remus finally said, settling on the sofa just inside of Severus's personal space – close enough their knees could knock together if either was inclined – while they waited for the kettle to boil. "Let them get that curiosity out. After all, there's going to be a child running about these rooms eventually."

"For the best," Severus mocked, rolling his eyes at Remus's ignorance – ignoring the brief flash of anxiety that the rooms might remain childless, might become Severus-less as well. "How could anything good possibly come of me being crammed in a room with our peers, while they make and coo over this," he snapped out, gesturing downward at the swollen jut of his belly.

A soft hum of contentment along the edges of his thoughts accompanied the tender look the werewolf was giving him. "If you would let me make and coo over you like I want to, then maybe you'd begin to see it as a good thing. You're rather lovely like this, you know."

Severus offered up a derisive snort in response, his palms smoothing along Bump lovingly. The contentment turned into something far heavier, headier at the back of his thoughts – something much like devotion, but thankfully the kettle whistled sharply, calling Lupin from his place on the couch. And a moment later, the werewolf returned with a cup of peppermint tea, holding it out to Severus for acceptance before the lighter man folded himself back on the couch, eying him.

"Maybe . . . it would be wise to have a small get-together. Pomona asks about you often; Sybill and Hagrid too. Whether or not you believe it, our peers care about you Severus, and you *have* been

rather remiss lately."

He snorted around the rim of his teacup, sipping pensively at the hot liquid. "Sounds like another opportunity for me to be lectured that I should be on maternity leave already," Severus grumbled, rubbing Bump absentmindedly. Remus leaned forward, rubbing his cheek against the sharp point of Severus's shoulder, thoroughly surprising him as that heavy, loving feeling coated every space in his skull, clinging to the wrinkles of his thoughts and sticking.

"Well. That wouldn't be so bad, would it? Could wait on you hand and foot. You wouldn't even have to leave the bed except to bathe and use the loo."

Admittedly, it did sound tempting – though the last time the werewolf had confined him to his bed, Severus had wound up pregnant and as such the idea didn't bode as appealingly as it could have. He had no desire to be confined to his Dungeons for the rest of his life, pregnant and barefoot – popping out children as quickly as Lupin could breed him with them.

He scowled bitterly at the fireplace. "No. I'd rather you not paw at me day in and out."

The werewolf gave him a leer, cheek rubbing more firmly against Severus's shoulder before the lighter man leaned forward just enough to brush lips, hot and damp, against his neck, tracing the pulse there.

"Pawing at you is always delightful," Remus muttered, voice dark and husky as if Severus's misgivings had actually been a proposition.

Severus made a noncommittal noise high in his throat, knowing he would wind up doing as was asked of him . . . eventually. After nearly twenty years, Albus was rather competent when it came to manipulating Severus into doing more unseemly things.

Which was precisely how he found himself in his rooms a few days later, sitting on the sofa as Minerva and Poppy bustled about, setting up tables of food and trying to convince him he was doing

the right thing.

"I think this will be fun," Poppy chirped, bringing him over a cup of tea and patting his hand softly. "You'll see!"

Out of the corner of his eye, Severus could see Minerva chuckling, roping Lupin into helping with the festivities. "Yes Severus," the older professor called. "It'll be a nice change of pace for you – hanging out with people other than two older women and a werewolf." He rolled his eyes as Remus joined Minerva in her laughter while Poppy spluttered with indignation.

"Well I *never* . . ." Poppy started, bristling at the comment – though a knock at the door stopped her well before any vitriol could spill from the tip of her tongue.

"They're here," Minerva chimed out, looking far too excited for the disaster that was about to ensue. Heaving out a long-suffering sigh, Severus pushed himself to his feet while Minerva saw to opening the door, to showing their guests inside. And suddenly, his rooms felt very . . . small as Pomona and Filius entered together, any leftover space disappearing as Hagrid followed close behind. Minerva's arm slotted through his, pulling him gently over to greet the other Heads of House and leaving behind a very jealous werewolf. Sprout immediately made a cooing noise, her hands clenching tightly as she beamed up at him. Filius was far less . . . refined in his approach to Severus's condition.

"I had thought you were starting to fill out about the middle," Filius squeaked; the dwarf's mouth turning upward in a smile as tiny, wrinkled hands touched Bump gingerly. Beside him, Minerva fell into deep cackles, which the Head of Ravenclaw seemed to ignore. "But I never thought this as an option though!"

Severus felt his mouth turn downward in a horrendous scowl, but he drew in a deep breath through his nose and stayed his tongue. He could forgive that comment – truly he could – as Filius was waist-level and more likely to see the edges of his glamor. "Quite unexpected," he finally sneered, leading the lot of them back toward the sofa as his feet began to ache.

"Oh dear, I've offended you! My most sincere apologies Severus, but you've always been such a wisp of a child. Seeing you like this is absolutely enchanting!" Small hands followed the swell of Bump once Severus had taken a seat as Flitwick plopped down beside him to continue to gentle exploration of Bump. That hot, wildfire jealous feeling itched its way across his scalp, choking in his chest, and Severus glanced across the room to where Remus was standing with Hagrid – the half-giant looked decidedly excited but cautious as he always did when Severus was involved, clutching at some ragged looking . . . thing.

"Yes – I am rather aware of the change in my appearance." Severus couldn't manage to keep his tone entirely free from the bitterness.

Thankfully, Sprout edged Flitwick out. She waved the dwarf away. "Filius, perhaps you should help yourself to the snacks, before you get yourself hexed and us all thrown out on our arses."

Filius deferred with a soft "yes dear" before scrambling from the sofa in his haste as Pomona began to take his seat before he had truly given it up; Minerva following after the Ravenclaw to discuss quidditch no doubt. Sprout smiled softly after Flickwick, and not for the first time did Severus note the quiet affection the Ravenclaw held for the Hufflepuff and vice versa; the soft simper of a smile on the older wizard's face nearly hidden by his beard, the gentle teasing of the younger woman to the older professor. He and Pomona sat there a moment, Severus grimacing lightly as another contraction gripped up the muscles in his stomach, soothed by his hand splaying, rubbing the soft swell of Bump. Suddenly, his back was killing him, and he wanted nothing more than his bed.

"You look dead tired, Severus," she finally said, peering up at him as her hand touched his shoulder. He bit back the urge to shy away as the hot itch took him over once more.

"I'm not sleeping much these days," Severus responded with a rueful almost laugh. "As I'm sure Poppy has told you, the baby's the size of a bloody pineapple and takes enjoyment from kicking my liver."

Pomona laughed softly, regarding him quietly in the manner that Severus was now very much accustomed to – the entire night would

be spent with the female staff of Hogwarts eying him and Bump dreamily he imagined. As though they all wondered what it would it be like to be in his state, swollen with child when they had forgone that desire themselves.

"Do you mind," slipped almost breathlessly into the air between them, and Severus acquiesced – as there was little else for him to do; no longer was his body his own. An almost unperceivable nod, and Pomona was leaning forward just slightly. Her hand pressed flat against the swell of Bump, the baby within responding with a sharp kick to her palm, earning him a beatific smile as though Severus had orchestrated the child's response to her touch. After a moment, her hand strayed to his thigh, patting it affectionately.

"It was good of Remus to volunteer to help look after you until the baby comes," she cooed, flashing a bright smile across the room in the general direction of the werewolf – who decidedly looked as though he wanted to rip Pomona's hand off.

"Excuse me," Severus said, tone sharp and cold. "Volunteered." The word came out with much less of a sneer than he would have liked.

"Oh yes! When Albus mentioned you had fallen in the Infirmary, we were all very concerned as you can imagine I'm sure," she started, leaning back in the sofa and folding hands over her belly. "More so when Albus said you were pregnant. Imagine that! Anyway, he mentioned that you would need a bit more care as you were nearing your due date." Sprout gave a soft laugh, giving him a cheeky smile. "I think we were all still a bit surprised to hear about your state, but finally Remus – that dear – spoke up, offering to move in and take care of you."

Cold betrayal settled heavily in his chest, chilling him as Severus glanced over to where Remus and Hagrid had been joined by Minerva, and the werewolf's attention had been fully captivated by someone other than himself, if only for a brief moment.

"I see," he finally managed, voice tighter than he would have liked. *So much for having been dragged to my rooms kicking and screaming*, he thought bitterly. Because as it was, that Lupin had lied about how he had found himself in Severus's chambers bothered him

much more than he cared to admit. He wondered how many other things had rung hollow. With a sniff of disdain, he let his attention return to Pomona, who seemed to have been carrying on merrily . . . unnoticing of the fact his attention was elsewhere.

" . . . and the mandrakes are maturing nicely this season; I'm sure I'll be able to provide you a few bushels by the end of the term."

"Perfect," Severus managed, pushing himself to his feet, hands settling in the small of his back – the movement seemingly having pulled Remus's attention to him; golden hazel eyes regarding him curiously. "I'm sorry Pomona, I find I need to move a bit. The baby's putting strain on my spine."

Sprout waved him away with a soft smile, eyes once more tracking the swell of his stomach.

Haltingly, Severus took a few steps, rubbing lightly at his spine. Poppy's fingers curled around his elbow, leading him toward the small table where hors d'oeuvres had been set up.

"How are you holding up, dear?" Again, the hot, wildfire ache in his skull, his chest – which only served to fuel his own feeling of betrayal. Not that he had wanted to be mollycoddled over, but at least when Lupin had been dragged to his rooms there had been a sense of shared misjustice. But it had been a ruse, and the werewolf had again found himself in Severus's bed. Because Severus had taken some comfort in the fact that they had both been thrown into a situation that neither had truly wanted . . . but Lupin had *volunteered*. He had stood before their peers in the staff lounge and offered to take care of Severus, unborn child and all. And it made his chest cinch.

"Fine," Severus bit out, scowling as he surveyed the treats and finding they all turned his stomach sharply, despite how delicious the bruschetta looked. He sighed, because the day had been blessedly empty of the ever-constant nausea but still his appetite was lacking. And he was certain if he were to try and eat anything, it would be scant moments until sickness was cramping his insides and leaving him to spend the remainder of the evening retching pitifully.

Poppy opened her mouth to speak, but the vast shadow of Hagrid overfell them, pulling them both into silence.

"Ah Professor! 'ow lovely ya look, positively glowin'!" The half-giant's tone was too bright, booming loudly in his skull. Poppy smiled and excused herself, and Severus found himself envious as she went.

"Hello Hagrid," Severus responded, moving slightly so to put space between himself and the food in case the larger man was there for that reason. But the half-giant moved with him, eyes sparkling greatly behind a tremendous amount of beard, seemingly perched on bunched, pinkened cheeks.

"'ere! This is fer ya and the wee one!" That ragged thing was thrust at Severus, which upon closer inspection as it found its way into his hands, Severus discerned it to be a teddy bear. The ears appeared to have been chewed on at some point, and some of the hair was loved off – the general wear and tear of it pointed at it having been a well-loved thing.

"Ah . . . thank you, Hagrid."

"Was me favorite when I was a lad. The only thing me mum ever gave me."

Which made the whole situation . . . sweeter. As suddenly the bear wasn't just a chewed-on child's toy, but something loved and cherished that was being passed on to him and his baby. Like love being physically passed along to him and his.

". . . thank you," Severus finally managed to utter, looking up at Hagrid curiously. Because the half-giant had always been slightly apprehensive of him – which had never softened, especially when Dumbledore had tasked Hagrid with keeping vigil for the nights Severus was called away but was expected to return, like asking the shepherd to wait for the Devil. And how many times had Rubeus Hagrid been privy to seeing Severus creep back to Hogwarts, pulling himself through the Forest bloodied and half-broken? How many times had he gripped Severus's elbow gently and helped him along?

But there was the large oaf of a man, offering a token of love like a balm to the soul. As though Severus was deserving of caring for that token, as though the baby was deserving of accepting it. His chest was much too tight.

Hagrid made a soft noise, and then the larger man moved, monstrous hands cupping Bump – somehow making the swell of Severus's stomach look merely as though he'd eaten a rather large lunch instead of the fact he was nearing the end of his third trimester. And Severus found himself shocked into immobility, as Hagrid's entire attention seemed to focus solely on Bump. The baby kicked; Hagrid laughed; Severus swayed backward slightly but was held firm in a strong but cautious grip.

"So lovely."

For a brief moment, Severus found himself cautiously expecting Hagrid to sink to his knees, to rub his cheek against Severus's distended belly. Thumbs drew small circles through the tightly stretched fabric of his shirt, rubbing warmly at Bump.

Again, the baby kicked, twisted sharply in his guts, and Severus sucked in a gasp of air.

"A brat more like," Severus choked out, hand settling at the uppermost swell of Bump as if he could coax the baby into motionlessness.

Hagrid grinned down at him. "It'll be good fer ya, soften ya up some."

"If it doesn't kill me first," Severus grumbled, giving an affectionate rub to Bump while Hagrid laughed bright and loud, fists balling on wide hips as his body shook with laughter – calling Remus's attention to the odd couple, pulling the werewolf in their direction.

"Nay. Remus wouldn't let tha' happen, Sir. Yer lucky tah have 'im."

Severus almost – *almost* – told Hagrid he did not, in fact, *have* Lupin . . . but then the lycanthrope was edging in on them, smiling almost timidly. But that hot burn of jealousy – for once, not brought on by

contact – led Severus to believe that Remus, or rather the wolf hidden somewhere behind polite mannerisms, was in fact sizing the half-giant up, wedging his body between Hagrid and Severus. Remus's hand spread in the small of his back as the lighter man pushed into Severus's space, far closer than Hagrid – who smiled at the scene as if wise to the werewolf's actions. And perhaps he was, as a bumbling connoisseur of dark creatures after all.

"Can I get you anything," Remus asked, voice pitched low and soft in his ear.

He nearly choked on his snort, Severus shaking his head sharply. "No. I'm fine. But see to it that your Gryffindor friends do not trash my rooms," he sneered haughtily. Remus glanced in Hagrid's direction, but offered up a nod before Remus trotted off as if to see where the other professors had gone off to.

"'e cares fer ya," the half-giant crooned, making Severus roll his eyes.

"So, I'm told," Severus drawled, rubbing Bump lovingly. "Excuse me, Hagrid. I'm feeling a bit lightheaded and need to sit a spell."

"Should I carry ya," Hagrid inquired, hands extending, fingers spreading in offer. And Severus could just imagine the fit Remus would have if he accepted. Not that he cared. He *certainly* didn't care.

"No, no. It's fine." Severus motioned to the table. "Help yourself to some treats. And . . . thank you again."

Severus ambled toward the couch, refusing to think he had begun to edge on the side of waddling, his body so distended. Carefully he eased himself onto the couch, letting his spine sway inward in his exhaustion, depositing the worn bear on the coffee table more gently than Severus Snape would have ever imagined he was capable of before that moment. His hand rubbed cautiously along Bump, feeling the little imp kick heartily at his palm, his kidney, his spine, and causing him to grimace.

"I never expected to see you in a motherly way," Hooch exclaimed

as she dropped gracelessly down on the couch next to him, clapping his thigh rather aggressively. Her goggles were pushed back on her head, flattening some of her permanently in disarray hair.

A quick glance across the room found Remus engaged with Vector and Sinistra.

"Agreed. Quite the accident," Severus drawled, returning his attention to the slightly older woman.

She grinned at him. "Never took you for a *bottom*," Hooch leered, winking at him.

Severus choked out a derisive snort, rolling his eyes. "I'd thank you *not* to inquire or think about my sex life," he returned.

Hooch laughed – a great guffaw that managed to call Lupin's attention. She leaned forward, invading his space as her palms connected with Bump, sweeping across the swell. Her expression was one of curiosity, but not the usual desire he saw – wherein the life in his body made the other rethink their choices of a childless existence. The baby twisted lightly, as if rolling over in the bed of his guts. And Hooch gave him a look, drawing back. "That's an interesting feeling; keeping you up these days?"

"The little bugger is wont to kicking my kidney half past midnight," Severus admitted, rubbing the topmost swell of Bump affectionately. "Albus seems to think it'll be a quidditch player," he sneered, which garnered him another guffaw, another clap on his thigh.

"I'll be looking forward to it," Hooch exclaimed, getting to her feet and heading for the refreshment table to snatch up a cranberry and orange scone before she exited his chambers.

Severus let his head fall forward briefly in exhaustion, a heavy contraction cramping his stomach before soothing away; the baby kicked hard at his kidney, his lower ribs. Lifting his head, he pushed his hair back and sucked in a not-nearly-deep-enough breath.

"Brat," he scowled, rubbing the underside of Bump slowly.

"It can hear you, you know," Sybill intoned dreamily, sitting next to him and arranging the miles of skirts and gauzy scarves about her person. "I had noticed a change in aura – a softening, or perhaps a lightening. But I never thought this was the cause."

Severus bit back the hateful retort that jumped to the tip of his tongue easily. "Oh," he managed, his tone bored and dismissive – which Trelawney missed, as she always did.

"Yes. I thought you were finally accepting Remus's attempts to make you happy." She gave a breathy sigh, blinking at him owlishly from behind her too-big glasses. "Oh! I've something for you." She seemed to dig around in her skirt pocket for an inordinately long time before pulling out a rather large, exceedingly jagged cut of crystal that was almost black in the center, fading out into varying shades of purple only to be edged in white.

"Ah," he started, accepting the gemstone that was shoved into his hands.

"It's amethyst, Severus; encourages calming and peaceful energy. I thought it might help your baby sleep. Now and after."

He was unable to keep the dismissive snort in, which was also overlooked, as he held the crystal in his palm, letting his body heat warm the jagged contours of the gemstone. Though, admittedly, it was a lovely shade of tranquil purple.

"You're so lovely like this, Severus," she continued, her voice soft and hazy as if she'd been in the wine before she'd come.

And Severus found himself desperately wishing for a drink himself as he leaned forward to place the crystal alongside the teddy bear from Hagrid. Instead, he gritted his teeth and rubbed his palm along Bump, his fingers splaying wide over the upward swell. "I'm glad one of us thinks that," he bit out.

"I'm sure we all think it – Minerva and Poppy for sure. And I've seen the way Remus looks at you . . ."

"Have you seen the raspberry scones," Severus cut in, knowing they

were Trelawney's favorite. "I think Minerva had the house elves make them special for this party. You should try them – unless of course Hagrid has eaten them all." The look of interest in Sybill's face, the hurried motion to get to her feet left Severus feeling more at ease, grateful as the mess of a Divinations professor took her leave.

Of course, Vector and Sinistra took her place – not allowing Severus a moment's peace as they sat on either side of him, dark and quiet and looking softly at him.

"Oh Severus," Aurora started in, her fingers stopping just shy of touching Bump. But she took his silence as an acquiesce for her unasked almost-question. Fingers touched lightly then smoothed and splayed along Bump; Septima riding on the back edge of Severus's approval for Sinistra to touch as well. Severus glanced downward, watching four pale, somewhat bejeweled hands splay on the almost obscene swell of his stomach. The baby kicked, fluttered, pushed at those hands – as if acquainting itself with yet another set of people who would be in its life. The women cooed, bending further into his personal space as if drawn to Bump like a homing beacon. Severus snorted, rolling his eyes as he looked around the sitting room. Where he found Lupin, cornered by Minerva and Poppy but looking dangerously in his direction – that hot, burning, aching itch along his thoughts.

He wondered if the werewolf had begun to growl, as Minerva and Poppy both glanced in his direction.

"How far along are you," Vector asked, her voice breathless and soft. "Albus mentioned you were nearing the end of your pregnancy but . . ."

"Thirty-five weeks," he retorted. "And Albus knows little of my pregnancy, minus what Poppy tells him." Severus gave an amused snort, grateful to whatever gods who looked after male pregnancy that the old codger had *not* shown up to the party. Palms roamed slowly along Bump, grazing the sharp bites of his ribs.

"It's so intriguing," Sinistra continued, as if following Septima's thought process. "You look much the same . . ."

Again, Severus gave an amused snort. "Yes. Aside from the pineapple-sized child swelling my stomach horrendously."

The women twittered, their laughter soft and quiet – which only seemed to fuel Remus's misgivings, as he glared daggers across the room at the trio. Their hands withdrew, and Severus hurried to suck in a breath – the heavy, choking sensation only abating marginally, as if the wolf had reached the end of its proverbial rope and wanted everyone as far away from Severus as possible.

The doors to his room opened and allowed Albus entrance, and Severus bit back the groan. *Perhaps I should have sacrificed a small, fluffy animal to keep the gods appeased*, he thought ruefully, watching as Dumbledore immediately sought out Minerva and Poppy before turning a damnable, twinkling smile on him – though the Headmaster didn't seem inclined to harass him.

"Will you get much bigger," Vector asked, recalling his attention; the edges of her eyes had softened dreamily as she sighed, perhaps contemplating motherhood herself. She was still young enough for it.

"I should hope not, but probably. The brat still has five more weeks of growing to do," Severus responded, softness creeping into his tone as he rubbed Bump affectionately. "Five very *long* weeks I'm sure," he drawled, giving a wry almost-smile to the pair. Which seemed to be the very last straw for the lycanthrope, Severus noted – watching with hidden amusement as Lupin politely excused himself from Minerva and Poppy's company, stopped at the table for tea, and headed determinedly in his direction.

"Is the father, well the other father I mean. Is he in the picture," Aurora asked, touching his arm delicately as if concerned for his wellbeing.

The slight falter in Remus's step told Severus the werewolf had heard, so he offered up the biggest sneer he possibly could, turning on Sinistra with a honeyed-venom tone.

"No, and I find the idea of being a single parent almost liberating." Remus blanched, his face turning pale as he came to a stop at the

edge of the area rug. "After all, who wants to fight with another over how to raise a child."

The women seemed to accept his answer, and Severus gave Lupin a glower – hoping the Gryffindor felt just as betrayed as he did. The sinking feeling in his chest wasn't entirely Remus's, but Severus could ignore his hurt to greedily saturate himself in the werewolf's. The heavily cold sensation in his chest was the exact opposite of the hot itching feeling that still soaked itself into his thoughts – as though even then, when it seemed as though Severus had sworn off the werewolf, Remus was unable or perhaps unwilling to let him go.

"Excuse me, ladies. My babysitter seems to be coming to check on me," he told the women, who took it as the dismissal that it was and touched his arms affectionately in farewell before hurriedly fleeing before Remus – who had managed to unstick himself from the floor, managed to keep his warring desolation and jealous irritation hidden under politeness.

The gulp was almost audible as the werewolf came to a stop before him.

Remus held out the teacup; a tendon in his jaw the only inclination of teeth gritted tightly together.

"Keep your polite face on, Lupin," Severus purred lowly, accepting the teacup and feeling decidedly more exhausted than he had an hour ago, now that he'd been seen to by all their peers. "You look as though you're seconds away from beginning to growl at our guests."

"How much longer are they expected to stay." Honestly, Remus looked as irritable as he felt.

"No idea," he puffed out, body curving slightly as a contraction shuddered its way through his guts, his abdominal muscles tightening almost to the point of unbearable before relaxing. Severus rubbed his palm along Bump, fingers kneading gingerly at the skin just under stretched tight fabric. "But it's bad enough without you looking as though you want to attack our guests." Severus gave the lighter man a pointed look. "You said I should agree; I've agreed. Consequences are to be had." He placed the

teacup on the coffee table and pushed himself to his feet once more.

While his feet hurt, swollen as they were, the motion of walking offered some relief to the crippling crush against the base of his spine, pushing it forward onto his pelvic – which was somehow more bearable. He certainly wasn't walking to get away from the werewolf. Severus pressed himself into a conversation with Albus and Filius about something of little consequence to himself. But still, Severus found himself nodding in agreement, making almost noises in assent as the two older men conversed. His hand slid slowly along Bump's swell in thought, resting there just above the knob of his belly button.

Albus gave him a gentle smile, his own hand brushing out to give Bump an affectionate rub – the touch unasked for, though no longer shocking. Watching Dumbledore's hand retreat, he found he was able to better ignore the hot itch scrabbling at his skull.

"You look lovely, my dear boy. Absolutely lovely." Albus bent at the waist, and for a moment Severus was concerned the Headmaster would rub his wrinkly cheek against Bump – but thankfully he did not. "Hello, my little imp; are you keeping my Severus on his toes?"

"Not allowing me any sleep is more like it," Severus grumbled, earning him a soft, beatific smile from the Headmaster.

Again, Dumbledore's hand reached out to smooth along Bump, even as the older man straightened and resumed his conversation with Filius. The touch finally slipping away.

Severus had noticed as Bump had grown, his body was less and less his own. That more privileges were taken than was to be expected. Poppy and Minerva he could understand better than most as they were close and had only grown closer as of late, the two women verily seeming to vie for the position of grandmother. Though Severus had no intention of picking one or the other for the spot when his child could have both of them to dote on it. And the other women of the Hogwarts staff – for the most part – seemed more inclined to ask his permission before placing hands on his swollen abdomen. However, the men – namely Albus and Flitwick, though one could include Hagrid and Hooch in the category as well –

tended to touch first, hands reaching out to cup without so much as thinking to ask him if it was fine.

All in all, it was just another blatant disregard of *his* preferences.

Almost scowling, Severus made his way around the room, which Septima and Aurora took as an opportunity to once more coo and make over him and Bump before excusing themselves for an evening of marking. Heaving a sigh, Severus allowed himself to once more take his spot on the sofa – the short meander about the sitting room had left him tired, his feet hurting.

"Severus, you look rather exhausted. Perhaps we best see ourselves out," Minerva said quietly. She leaned over and placed a matronly kiss to his cheek before clapping sharply, drawing everyone's attention in the room. "All right everyone; party's over. Severus needs his rest. Come on, let's go." Minerva herded the other professors before her swiftly, raising a hand farewell to him and Remus.

Poppy had managed to avoid the crowd being guided from his rooms – or rather Minerva had allowed the mediwitch to stay a moment longer. "You'll let me know if you need anything, won't you?" Her hand once again touched his elbow – once again provoking that sharply jealous ache. "Perhaps a good, long rest will put you more to sorts. Stay in bed this weekend," she suggested, tone light but edged in concern.

"A weekend in bed sounds lovely," Severus relented, feeling very much thirty-five weeks pregnant and well beyond exhausted; his breath pulling from his lungs in a sigh. "If something changes, I'll call for you."

She gave him a searching look before nodding. "See that you do." Poppy turned on her heel and retreated, leaving him alone with a traitorous werewolf.

Words knotted coldly, sharply in his chest the moment the door to his chambers closed. Mounting in his throat, choking at the back of his tongue as Remus went about cleaning and putting the rooms back to their right state – clearly unaware of Severus's feeling of

discontent.

"You fucking lied to me," he finally spat out, arms crossing in defiance as though he expected Remus to deny the accusation. The hurt cracked out in him, breathed into the tone of his voice.

A befuddled look crossed the werewolf's gaze, Remus turning with his head cocked in obvious question. ". . . about?" Severus clenched his fingers into fists held shaking at his sides as he glowered at nothing in particular, unwilling to look at Lupin. Fingers curled around his elbow, "Severus . . ." the other started, tone low and curious. He yanked his arm away, taking a step away from the lighter man – suddenly desperate to put space between them.

"You *volunteered* for this," Severus hissed, once more feeling betrayal mount sharply in his chest. "You wanted this all along," he nearly yelled, words bouncing heavily off the dungeon stones of the sitting room. Because yelling was so much better than allowing himself to be a wounded, vulnerable thing.

"Severus . . ." the werewolf tried again, fingers curling around his bicep a bit more forcefully, but still Severus managed to yank himself from that grip – pushing at Remus's chest until the lighter man took a step back.

"Don't," he snapped out, glowering darkly at Lupin, who once more was trying to approach him. And Severus damned the Headmaster for putting the werewolf in his rooms; damned the werewolf for offering to take the place of babysitter. Damned himself for believing it hadn't all just been hollow. "Just don't. You and your idiotic Gryffindor ideals."

Severus shook his head, sucking in a deep breath through his nose. Again, fingers curled around his forearm, tugging him around to face Lupin. Those curious hazel eyes regarded him cautiously.

"What do you want me to say? Of *course* I volunteered. You're pregnant with my child, for Merlin's sake. And even if you weren't, I just want to be near you . . ." the other finished lamely. Some unnamed emotion rubbed itself against his thoughts, and Severus shook his head against it.

"Just get out."

The emotion spiraled downward into something much like despair. "Severus, please . . ."

He jerked his arm free from the lycanthrope's grip, arms crossed resolutely across his chest. "Get the fuck out, Lupin," Severus snarled, glowering at the lighter man before stalking to his bedroom, slamming the door behind him. He magicked his heavy armoire in front of the door and threw himself down on the bed.

His chest ached, but Severus refused to acknowledge it – instead, he let the betrayal set a bitter fire in his thoughts, choking him. The backs of his eyes burned, but Severus just pressed his face into the pillow, smelling Lupin on the case – sweet and musky in a way that managed to comfort him. Severus sat up and threw the pillow across the floor, growling – irritated with himself for beginning to trust the stupid fucking werewolf, for letting himself be lulled; for that one fucking night all those many months ago that had led him *damnably* to the present. Rubbing his face roughly, Severus finally climbed off the bed and moved the armoire back to its rightful place. He half expected to trip over the bloody werewolf when Severus pulled open the door.

However, the small hallway was empty of the lighter man. And Severus allowed himself to enter the sitting room – expecting to find Lupin on the sofa . . . but found only bare cushions.

As it was, his rooms were painfully, dreadfully empty . . . much like Severus's chest. But he sniffed derisively at that emptiness, bundled himself up in his hurt and bitterness, and returned to bed. Severus yanked the covers up over his head, and turned his back to the body pillow, choosing instead to bracket Bump with the remaining pillows on the bed.

Severus gritted his teeth against the unexpected hurt and turned his face into his pillow.

He didn't *need* that damn beast, nor did he *care* that when pressed Remus had simply . . . left.

36 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a papaya

Severus was under no inclination to tell a soul how *empty* his rooms, his bed felt without the damnable werewolf. The weekend following the small party had been absolute hell, and whatever sleep he *had* been managing to get with Lupin plastered to his back had dried up and blown away.

But he would never admit it.

Instead, on Monday he schooled his face into his very best mask and joined Poppy in the Infirmary. The week would be spent brewing the Wolfsbane, which would offer Severus enough distraction that he'd be able to overlook that dull ache in his chest. It also meant it was best to get his visit out of the way quickly, lest he forget.

Poppy tutted over him as he undid his shirt, stretched himself out on the bed.

"You look as though you've lost another half a stone, Severus," she exclaimed softly, her fingers finding the hollow spaces where his ribs gaped.

"I'm trying Poppy, truly I am. Nothing stays down," Severus lied effortlessly. Because, as it was the werewolf had seemingly taken whatever little appetite the baby had allowed him with Remus when he'd left. And all Severus had been left with was cruel cramps and heaving retches.

Her palm soothed along the heavy swell of his stomach, thumb kneading small patterns into the skin, and Severus squinted his eyes against the tenderness.

"This is the final month, but no doubt it'll be the longest one yet," Poppy told him tenderly, her fingers prodding at his guts gingerly.

"The baby's the size of a papaya." A moment of quiet. "How are you holding up, dear?"

He managed to give a snort of amusement, closing his eyes tightly against a contraction that gripped his abdomen; the baby twisting heavily in his guts. "Ready for it to be over," Severus finally managed, voice tight and choked in his throat.

Poppy's hand moved from Bump, which Severus took to mean he was free to get up. He tried not to puff too much as he planted his arms behind him and pushed, the considerable swell of his stomach making it much more difficult than it should have been to get into a seated position.

Severus moved to the edge of the bed, legs dangling over the side while his mind tried to right itself.

"We've missed you at the table this weekend," Poppy finally said, chin lifting as if she expected him to spill all his worries.

"Confined to bed," Severus bit out, pushing off the bed and heading toward the desk where his clothes had been left, pulling on his shirt and doing up the buttons slowly.

"Remus was there . . . looking decidedly worse for wear – like he isn't sleeping."

Severus snorted, focusing overly hard on the buttons of his shirt, the fabric pulling tightly against the swell of Bump.

"Severus . . ." the mediwitch prompted, her tone softer, more maternal than he would have liked.

"We had a row. I kicked him out." There – the whole dirty secret of it laid bare, like bones long since decayed by hurt and bitterness.

"Oh, you poor dear," Poppy tutted. "That kind of stress isn't good for the baby."

He gave a derisive snort, pulling on his heavy teaching robes and for once not bothering to do up the buttons. Severus drew up the concealment spell and headed to the Dungeons for yet another

rousing attempt at trying to teach First Year Gryffindor's and Slytherins the poetry of brewing.

And by the end of Monday, Severus had all but given up trying to teach – the insolent brats wearing on him far more than usual. He forwent dinner – as he was wont to do – and stripped down to his shirtsleeves and trousers.

A contraction tightened along Bump, choking the breath from his lungs, leaving him leant against the workspace for a lingering moment until the cramp eased. Slowly, as if to strengthen his resolve, Severus rolled his sleeves – the left cuff sitting far lower than the right, even though the Dark Mark had scabbed, smeared, faded with time's passing.

With careful precision, Severus prepped the ingredients for the Wolfsbane – sharp obsidian blade whispering through herbs, crushing moonstone, cutting leaves.

Severus recounted the steps . . . once, twice – mentally instructing himself on the one potion he would never be able to forget.

He let himself slip into the act of it, fingers moving delicately. For the moment, Severus was able to ignore the uneasy feeling in his stomach – was able to tell himself that it was because the baby had taken up moving, and not at the notion of seeing Remus.

A particularly hard twist sent him running for the sink, retching pitifully though he had nothing to give. Just blood and bile, the sharp acidity of stomach fluid grounding him.

Sucking in a deep breath, Severus returned to the potion – pushing through the lightheaded feeling to finish . . . because dinner would be over soon, the werewolf would come for his potion, and Severus would be allowed to retire to those dreadfully empty rooms to try to sleep. He let himself be lulled into the methodism of brewing; the importance of stirring, of the angle at which ingredients were added, the color of the brew. And when he came back to himself, ladling the Wolfsbane into the silver chalice with a sigh, Severus was rather surprised to see the werewolf sitting at a work bench – watching him.

Remus looked dreadful – eyes smudged heavy with sleeplessness, in need of a shave, hair in disarray.

"Drink," he bit out, holding the cup out toward the other – wanting nothing more than for the moment to be over, buried, gone forever.

Severus reminded himself not to shy away as Remus approached, stepped dangerously close to the edge of his personal space. Hazel eyes soft; gaze open.

"You looked peaceful," Remus finally said, tone twisted ruefully.

He pointedly ignored the hum of emotion across his thoughts – something soft and tender.

Severus exhaled a snort and held the chalice up higher, as though the lycanthrope had forgotten why he'd come. "I *am* a Potions Master; I rather enjoy the art," he tried to sneer.

Again, that soft look, and Severus was on decidedly uncertain ground – what with the way Lupin was looking at him; that gentle emotion cloyingly sweet at the back of his skull. His chest felt too tight.

"I should have kissed you."

He snorted again. "You've done more than kiss, if you've forgotten," Severus drawled wryly, gesturing vaguely downward at his stomach, still hidden away by the concealment spell. He pushed the chalice against Remus's chest, infinitely gratefully as the werewolf finally plucked it from his fingers.

But still – there were no further motions indicating the lighter man was going to drink.

"I meant before. Back in the library . . . in Fifth Year."

Severus swallowed hard, watching as the lycanthrope regarded the potion, eyes suddenly lackluster before upturning the chalice with a grimace. The cup wasn't returned to him; instead, Remus clutched it tightly in his palms.

"I wanted to." The silence crashed in between them, heavy and ungainly, only to be broken open by a scoff of amusement. "*Merlin*, I wanted to. But I was . . . afraid. What if you rejected me; what if Sirius and James found out. What if I was left with nothing at the end of it."

Suddenly, Severus found he didn't want to hear Remus's pitiful confessions. Drawing in a deep breath, he reached forward and plucked the goblet from the werewolf's lax grip. The other's fingers curled tightly around the delicate bones of his wrist, keeping Severus well within Remus's space.

"I'm sorry . . . for more than you could ever imagine, Severus."

And Circe, how he *hated* how much those words felt like a balm to his soul. He hated that exhausted, desperately open *softness* the other bared so willingly. He hated that some tiny part of himself, wedged way down deep in the wreckage of his soul, wanted recklessly to *believe* Remus.

Severus ground his teeth together and jerked his hand free. "Same time tomorrow, Lupin," he bit out, heading for his rooms.

He nearly missed the crushed tone that chased quietly after him.

"Remus." A broken reminder from a broken man.

And Severus shut the door firmly behind him.

The next day resulted in heavy contractions – at least one every hour . . . sharp enough to choke his breath from his lungs, to leave him gripping at the nearest surface until the pain subsided. Severus fixed himself a cup of tea with dreadfully shaking hands, trying to will his digits into stillness.

The sudden palsy certainly would *not* do whilst brewing the delicate Wolfsbane. One wrong move while he prepared the ingredients could prove disastrous.

Sickness cramped in his guts, a sense of unease as if the baby had suddenly taken to gymnastics. The weak feeling he felt made Severus grit his teeth in resignation while he focused on cutting the

necessary herbs. He resolutely ignored the roil in his stomach, the overactivity of his saliva glands. Instead, Severus focused solely on the potion. His skin felt clammy, and Severus could feel the beads of sweat popping up on his forehead, accompanying that terrible lightheaded feeling. Severus sniffed disdainfully and leant against the countertop, the shallowed cut of his hip digging into the edge of his workspace, pressing against the underswell of Bump.

Just a few more moments, he told himself, but there was that familiar burn that would not be ignored as he charmed the stirring rod to keep up its continuous swirl, hand gripping hard at the counter as Severus retched on the floor. Bent at the waist, jaw pried open as the bile trickled lethargically past his teeth, clinging to his lips.

As it was, he had managed only one cup of tea – current cup excluded – and most of it was presently on the floor, splattered across the toes of his boots.

Sucking in a breath, he banished the mess with a wave of his hand and returned his attention back to the Wolfsbane, fingers catching on the charmed stirring rod and continuing the counterclockwise motion without falter. His free hand smoothed along Bump, silently begging the infant to just let him finish the potion, mentally promising a long soak to the imp if only he could make it through the next hour.

"Severus . . . are you all right?" Heavy concern coated his thoughts, pressed against his skull oppressively. Remus's voice startled him, nearly making him jump – causing a sharp kick to the base of his spine. Severus sucked in another breath, finally capable of the inhale being almost as deep as he wanted as Bump had shifted, resting lower on his hips . . . the baby moving downward.

"Fine," Severus bit out, his hand clutching at the countertop as he focused on the potion. Just five more minutes. Already it was beginning to lighten to the correct shade of silver, trapped somewhere near lilac but lightening with each stir.

"Do you need to sit?"

"No, Lupin. I need to finish your potion, and we *both* know that

you're highly incapable of brewing such a delicate thing."

A soft almost laugh, and Severus tried desperately to bundle himself up in his betrayal. But as it was, his bed was *dreadfully* empty, and the baby was restless . . . as if just as happy as he was that the heating element had been removed from his bedchamber.

Arms came around his waist, low on his hips, cradling Bump . . . supporting him, and Severus let himself sag for a moment. He heaved out a sigh, because as it was his body hurt, and the baby was pressing against all his soft inner bits, squishing them. All of which would have been almost bearable . . . if only he'd been sleeping, allowed to eat just a little. But he had no reprieve of that either. So, all in all, Severus was quite miserable. Catching himself, Severus struggled upward, once more gripping hard at the counter while he focused on the potion – completely ignoring the werewolf at his back.

"I wish you'd let me help you," came that soft, almost kicked tone. A warm, broad palm smoothed along his back, and Severus was certain the other could feel the tremors that barbed along the sharp ridges of his spine.

"I'm fine."

"You look as if you're about to fall over," the werewolf ground out.

"I fail to see how that's any concern of yours," Severus bit out as haughtily as he was able as yet another contraction cramped his guts. He focused on keeping his hands steady as he ladled the potion into the goblet, breathing hard through his nose. Turning, he nearly sighed with relief as he rested his back against the counter, holding the potion out to Remus coldly.

There was no fight that time – Lupin accepting the goblet, downing its contents in a well-practiced motion, grimacing as he held the cup. But the werewolf didn't move, edged in tightly against Severus's space, as if reminding him of how lovingly their bodies slotted together.

"I could carry you to bed," Remus finally said, peering at him with

curious eyes, more golden than the day before. "Rub your back, your feet. Draw you a bath." Fingers brushed a stray strand of hair behind his ear as the werewolf moved closer, the simple action somehow predatorily protective.

"No," Severus drawled coldly, tone pitched low in its resolve. Admittedly resolve that was weakening.

"I worry about you down here by yourself. Perhaps you let me stay a bit, 'til bedtime . . . then I'll head back up to my Golden Tower alone . . ." Remus tapered off, clearing his throat as if to come off as a bit less desperate. But Severus could feel that sharp, demanding ache pressing against his thoughts, settling in his chest as if the wolf was loathed to take no for an answer. But Lupin was too polite to make demands, instead choosing to stand there desperately in the Dungeons pleading with him.

He pushed against the other's chest; the lycanthrope fought the movement before relenting, stepping away. And Severus pulled in a deep breath. "I'm fine, Lupin. Same time tomorrow," he said less sharply than he would have liked, heading for the door.

The following day, Severus told himself he should take a meal in the Great Hall – settling on lunch and sitting as attentively through Trelawney's ramblings as he could. He was well aware of Minerva's gaze on him, curious but quiet.

There was that high-pitched buzz at the base of his skull, a desperate need on Remus's part to see him, touch him, be near him. The lycanthrope had managed to move three seats to Lupin's right, putting him closer to Severus's claimed spot. He could feel the fervent glances cast his way, but resolutely kept his gaze on his food. The broth hadn't been strained, residual oil beading on the surface, lingering slickly on his tongue.

Severus felt a hand touch his back and glanced to his left, meeting Minerva's gaze.

"Are you all right, Severus? You're very . . . pale."

"Fine, just tired." He swirled his spoon through the broth, suddenly

feeling very queasy and pushed it away.

The Hall was too much – a strain on his senses, but he forced himself to sit still. Severus focused on sipping his tea, on ignoring Sybill, on lying to Minerva as the discomfort in his stomach grew steadily worse. A contraction seized along the underswell of Bump, and he had to remind himself not to give the glamored-away distention of his abdomen a tender, soothing rub.

"Severus . . ."

He turned his head, regarded the Headmaster where the older wizard had leaned forward to look at him down the table.

"Yes, Headmaster."

"I'd like to see you in my office after lunch."

Severus nodded, trying to ignore that queasy sick feeling as he returned his attention to his tea before leaving the Great Hall.

Which was exactly how he found himself spending his planning period – the one blessedly student-free moment of the workday – in Albus Dumbledore's office. Which, he would gladly take Hufflepuff/Ravenclaw First Years over the current situation.

The older man poured him a cup of tea, regarding him with twinkling eyes over halfmoon glasses.

"How are things, dear boy?"

"Fine," Severus bit out, watching Dumbledore apprehensively, his fingers splaying on Bump as if waiting for the older wizard to reprimand him for the whole thing with Remus.

"And the Wolfsbane? It's coming along well, I'm sure?"

Severus scowled before clearing his throat. "Yes. Lupin is very prompt when given the correct motivation."

Albus nodded, taking a sip of his tea.

"I've noticed quite a bit of . . . distance since the party?" The soft, upward lilt in the other's tone made Severus clench his fingers around his teacup's handle.

"My stomach has been bothering me; I've been staying in bed, close to the bathroom." Not a complete lie, but still . . . Severus expected the older man to call him on the drivel.

But instead Dumbledore nodded, making a noise of assent high in his throat as he sipped his tea slowly. All of which, Severus found maddening. He *wanted* the Headmaster to call him on his lie, to expose the barely hidden away secret that he'd thrown Remus from his rooms.

"Perhaps Remus is exhibiting sympathetic behaviors of your pregnancy, as his stomach also is queasy as of late." A knowing look. "You both seem well beyond exhausted."

He waved his hand vaguely. "The baby is prone to twisting around in the pre-dawn hours. Shakes the whole bed."

"I see."

Severus sniffed in boredom, placing his teacup down. "Quite." He cleared his throat as he got to his feet. "If that's all Headmaster . . ."

"Do let him take care of you Severus. If you won't accept my offer for extended maternity leave, I would feel much better if you'd let Remus help you as much as possible." A pointed look. "That's all I'll say on the matter."

For now remained unspoken between them, a quiet promise for further meddling if needed.

He nodded and headed from the office, trying not to think overly hard about the situation. Dumbledore had already thrown the werewolf into his rooms once, and he found he was loathed to discover what other measures the Headmaster would take if deemed necessary.

The rest of the day wore on Severus, pulling him closer and closer to exhaustion, the desire for his bed mounting – in spite of how

empty it felt.

Severus worked slowly, methodically – first through his remaining classes then the act of brewing, recounting the steps precisely as if he had read them from a book. His hands moved automatically; his attention drifted away.

Time floated past, coming back to him as he ladled the Wolfsbane into its silver goblet.

He situated himself behind his desk, settling his robes about him as he waited for Lupin; the chalice sat steaming on his desktop. Severus counted the days until the full moon – the cycle always seemed to move much faster as they approached warmer months.

A soft tap at his classroom door, but the werewolf didn't wait for an answer, pushing through and bringing with him an almost desperate eagerness – though Severus couldn't be sure if it was a desire for the potion or to see him. Either seemed plausible, as the wolf seemed much more aggressive as the week wore on, called by the looming moon.

Lupin looked just as miserable, as worn down as he felt – which served as a small boost to Severus, grateful that he wasn't the only one suffering.

For once, Remus needed no coaching, instead approaching the goblet and downing the contents quickly. There was hesitation, though, as the other stood just on the other side of his desk. But Severus was determined not to be the first to speak. Instead, he watched the werewolf's jaw clench, a tendon in the other's neck flexing sharply as if biting back words. A myriad of bright emotions itched at him – nervous and hurt and desperate all at once.

A hand reached out to him and fell dreadfully short, fingers resting on the desktop between them.

All in all, Severus found the situation to begin to border on pitiful, unbearable and he turned to leave before Remus spoke. Before Severus's resolve crumpled completely.

"Just . . . please, Severus. Let me come back." That honeyed gaze stuck him to the spot, the werewolf verily begging him. "I'll stay on the couch. Fuck, I'll sleep on the *floor*."

Remus swallowed hard; the sound of it audible in the quiet of the room – and Severus had found he was suddenly holding his breath. His chest cinched up tight with want. Strong fingers curled tightly around his wrist, pulling his hand to Remus's face; lips whispered along Severus's knuckles before the werewolf pressed his cheek into Severus's palm, eyes closed.

"Please, Severus."

His chest was too tight. There was too much emotion there – his and Remus's, pooling heavy in that place just beneath his lungs, choking him. Severus swallowed hard, blinking his eyes tightly closed because he *wanted* to say yes . . . Circe help him, he did.

But how many times had the Marauders made him a fool; how many times had Remus simply stood by and let it happen. How many more times would Severus fall for that bait of acceptance.

He swallowed hard and jerked his hand free, bundling himself in hurt and betrayal, overlooking the desperate crush of emotion – a jumble of his and Lupin's feelings melding together heavy and sharp in his chest.

"No Remus," Severus whispered, voice halting and unsteady even to his own ears. A declaration that seemed to echo off the stones of his classroom, tearing them both down as the werewolf lifted a teary gaze to his – looking, *feeling* utterly broken.

But Severus couldn't manage to make himself feel as though he had won.

Instead, he fled – letting his office door fall shut behind him, whisper-soft but heavily resolute.

Severus stumbled into his room, into his bed, curling tightly around the body pillow. He told himself he would send the potion with a house elf for the remainder of the week, unwilling to see the

werewolf any longer as every moment together seemed to cleave at him – tear him down into something hurt and vulnerable rather than spiteful and bitter. Swallowing hard, he pushed his face into his pillow and tried to quiet his thoughts – focusing instead on mentally commanding himself to inhale, exhale rather than think about an anguished plea from a fragmented werewolf.

The rest of the week, if Remus came to his classroom, Severus didn't know it – choosing the cowardly way out, though if asked he would say he was merely exhausted. He sent the potion via house elf, as he had promised himself, and then holed himself up in his rooms, determined to not think about the werewolf.

And the moon seemed to loom heavier and heavier on Lupin – the lighter man looking more and more beaten down every time Severus saw him.

Though not that Severus cared – despite what that tight feeling in his chest might have indicated.

And when the moon rose, full and heavy, Severus sat in his sitting room, watching moments tick past while trying to focus on *Unusual Poisons* – reading it for the third time but not seeing any of the words, as they all seemed cursed to melt and drip into smeared ink while he stared at the pages.

He most certainly was *not* holding his breath that the wolf would somehow find its way to his door.

But there was the overly loud scratch at his chambers, and Severus closed his eyes to it. He had quietly wondered how the wolf would react to being turned out on its ear; had patiently waited for moonrise to see how the night would unfold.

A sharp bark; nails gouging at wood, at stone.

It would do no good for a student to accidently stumble across the beast just on the other side of the door – he knew, he'd been there. And the thought of some First Year pissing their pants all because they'd come face to face with the Big Bad Wolf in a dark Dungeons corridor was a headache Severus would rather avoid – even if Albus

had *wisely* held his tongue about Remus suddenly taking back up in his own rooms.

Huffing out a breath, he pushed himself to his feet, hands automatically sliding down to cup Bump as if he could carry some of the child's weight on his palms rather than his pelvic bone.

Yanking the door open, Severus glowered at the wolf – who stood still, head lowered, and tail pathetically curled between hind legs.

"If you're coming in, I suggest you do so before I change my mind," he hissed, glaring as the oversized cur scrambled between the door and his leg as if suddenly very aware of the possibility of Severus slamming the door in its pointed lupine face.

He watched the flagged tail disappear down the short corridor to his bedroom, and Severus sighed, rubbing the small of his back sharply as he followed the wolf at a more relaxed pace.

There was a small sense of victory, a sharp and hidden kernel of feeling high in his chest, as he entered his room. The wolf stretched across the foot of the bed, giving him plenty of space. And Severus made a big show of getting comfortable, of arranging his pillows and bedclothes just *so* before letting his head hit the pillow.

Severus counted to five before the wolf had crawled up the bed, an almost purring noise somewhere between a whimper and a whine caught high in the beast's throat. A heavy lupine head rested against his thigh, then his chest; a pointed nose edging up toward the hinge of his jaw until Severus could feel the hot, damp flare of the other's breath behind his ear, stirring his hair.

Another high whine; a cold nose pressed behind his ear, pulling his skull affectionately against the wolf's.

And he let his fingers run slowly along the other's ears, tugging at them gingerly – taking solace in the heavy, hot weight against him. The baby fell quiet in his guts, as though the heat of the werewolf had lulled it to sleep. And with it, so did he.

He woke with bare limbs tangled with his, a head tucked under his

chin; hot breath puffed against his throat. And while Remus was the one tucked in against his side, there was no mistaking the possessiveness there – arms wound tightly around Severus's chest, hands clutching at his back as if the lighter man was afraid he'd slip away.

"Thank you," Remus whispered against his skin, leaving small wet kisses against his throat. "Wasn't sure you'd let me in . . ." the other trailed off.

And Severus was suddenly aware of his hand still resting against the lycanthrope's skull, fingers pushed just barely through graying hair in an affectionate gesture. And even more so that there was an extremely naked Lupin in his bed – somehow managing to make his hormones a wreck.

"Couldn't have you mauling a student, now could I," Severus bit out as coldly as he could, which was substantially lessened as he continued to remain tangled up with the other man – thin sleep pants doing nothing to hide his body's increasing interest.

A low chuckle was emitted against his throat, and the werewolf seemed to press impossibly closer. Severus bit back his groan, squinting his eyes shut against the feeling of the other in his arms, as though he could pretend it was all a dream.

"I missed you," Remus muttered softly as the other breathed in deep and slow, as though reacquainting himself with Severus's scent. "My bed, my arms were so fucking empty." A low, pitiful hiss – something near anguish pooling at the base of his skull while the lighter man pushed as close as Bump would allow.

"I will admit the Dungeons were rather . . . cold without you," he finally allowed himself to breathe out, gritting his teeth against that vulnerable feeling that mounted with those words.

The lycanthrope pulled back and watched him carefully before fingers slid along his jaw, cupping the hinge and Severus let himself go, let himself be pulled into the kiss which seemed to suck the breath from his lungs and breathe life into him all at once.

A sharp nip against his bottom lip, the skin rolled and sucked into Remus's mouth by now-human teeth; a tongue pressing hungrily, wetly into his mouth – and Severus let it.

His fingers curled tightly in Remus's hair, feeling the thick strands crinkle and ruck against his knuckles and palm, pulling the other closer, reveling in that simple connection.

Severus sucked in a deep breath through his nose as Remus moved just enough to seemingly loom over him, to kiss him more deeply, press him back into the pillows with more fervor. The hand at his jaw knotted in his hair as the werewolf leaned on a forearm, hips crushed together and rocking.

Then that mouth was running hotly, wetly down his neck – nipping, sucking, licking as it went. A low growl trapped somewhere in Remus's throat, nearly choking Severus at the sound, at the heady arousal rubbing heavily at the back of his thoughts.

He had absolutely no idea what to do with his other hand, finally settling on clutching at Remus's back, fingers flexing hard.

Of course, Bump was getting in the way – and Severus internally flinched. The last time Remus had been on top of him, he'd been svelte . . . and intoxicated enough to have some confidence in his appearance. But as it was, even the low light in the Dungeons couldn't soften, hide the heavy swell of his stomach.

Perhaps the flinch had been external, as the werewolf suddenly pulled back and gave him a look. "You're thinking too much," the other admonished, shifting onto his knees nearer Severus's thigh. His fingers wadded in Severus's sleep pants, tugging them down slowly enough that Severus could stop him if he really wanted to.

Severus squinted his eyes shut, fought the urge to push his face into the pillow. Because the heavy, swollen, sometimes squirming swell of his stomach was *decidedly* feminine – and the total opposite of the twitching erection that jutted upward from his hips.

Remus ran hands along his sides, clutching at his hips, his thighs. The other leaned forward again, kissing him much less desperately.

"Knees," the lighter man panted, nosing at Severus's jaw. "Would be best I think."

Again, he flinched, not blaming Remus for not wanting the act ruined by Bump – started to move away, when Remus's hand caught his jaw, stilling him. Those peculiar eyes regarded him for a moment before the lycanthrope once more crushed their hips together, pricks rocking together in a way that choked a moan from Severus's throat.

"Remus," he started in, breathless and strung out, completely wrecked.

"I want what's easiest, most comfortable for you."

He blinked, swallowed hard. "Knees, I think."

It was a bit harder than he anticipated, rolling onto his knees. His arms immediately unhinging, elbows pressed hard against the bedclothes as his body slanted downward, hips pushed up and out.

Severus expected the werewolf to get at it immediately. Instead, the lighter man ran broad, warm palms along his back, his sides. Tenderness was pooling in his skull, choking out every other emotion, wrecking his own emotions. He twisted his head to almost glare at the werewolf, breath choking hard in his chest with want.

"Would you get on with it."

Remus chuckled softly, his hand sliding slowly down Severus's spine, fingers stroking at each vertebra. "I feel I'm granted a bit of time to appreciate you – having spent nearly nine months chasing after you."

He twisted his head to make some sort of remark, but then fingers slickened as if with a thought were pressing against him, in him – sharp and stretching, sucking his breath out, forcing his face into his pillow as he groaned. The werewolf curled around him, motions slow and cautious as he ground his weeping prick into Severus's hip, placed gentle kisses along his back.

Embarrassing, he thought without really any rancor, letting out a

shuddering gasp as Remus rubbed two fingers against his prostate delightfully. His prick jumped at that touch, drooling precum as he pushed back on those digits, moaning – subsequently pressing against the werewolf's erection, sparking yet another heady round of want in his chest, in his guts.

Remus's lips and teeth were laving attentions against his back, his shoulders – anywhere they could reach.

"*Fuck*," he gasped aloud, fingers twisting particularly hard in the sheets under him, his face buried in the pillow. *Pregnancy hormones*, he reminded himself, even as shaking knees spread just a little more at a rather aggressive rub against that bundle of nerves.

He was moaning low in his throat, hips wiggling. The promise was there, as it had been all those months ago, of something wild and insatiable boiling under the werewolf's skin – fucking, claiming, possessing him in every sense.

"Please," Remus ground out, flopping onto his back beside Severus – leaving Severus exasperatingly empty.

It took him longer than he cared to admit that he was to get up – finally pushing himself into a seated position with shaking arms. Remus was stretched out on his back, cock jutting upward, flushed and damp. Chest heaving, hair in disarray.

Those hazel – *hungry* – eyes caught his, warm hands grabbing at his thigh and hip, pulling him closer. And Severus allowed himself to be manhandled by the werewolf, made to straddle the other's hips, to push down against a flared cockhead.

He groaned, wiggled his arse against Remus's hips, trying not to flinch too hard as the intrusion rubbed roughly against his prostate.

Remus's hands wrapped tightly around his hips, moving him at a slow pace. Severus let himself be manipulated, hands flared on the werewolf's chest, mouth open and panting. His spine curved, body accommodating around Bump, trying not to think of how ridiculous of a scene they must have made.

"Fucking perfect," Remus groaned, causing Severus to wiggle a little as the other's hips lifted.

Hazel eyes slotted open to stare at him, as Remus held Severus tight against his hips, cock buried in the last free space of his guts while the werewolf ran possessive palms along every inch of him that *wasn't* Bump.

The feeling itching at the back of his skull had descended into more than just the need to fuck, to possess – it was sticky and thick, heavy and warm, cloyingly sweet . . . feeling a lot like devotion, a four-lettered word Severus didn't want to think about. That Severus *refused* to think about.

Hands curled, crushed around his hips, lifting him slowly before pressing him back down on the other's prick. The sensation of it choked him, burned him, wrecked him. How long had he been stewing in his want for a proper fucking, only for the werewolf to be treating him like glass. Although, each downward stroke rubbed Remus's thick length along Severus's prostrate in a way that made him want to weep.

"I thought you were going to fuck me," Severus finally managed to breathe out; any bitterness torn apart with breathless moans that he would *never* admit to uttering.

The werewolf managed to chuckle, chest hitching. "Still savoring."

Huffing, Severus drew his knees in close to Remus's sides, the sharp edges pressing into the other's flanks. He planted his hands on the broad, furred chest and sucked in a deep breath through his nose. There was a glint in the werewolf's eyes that told Severus the other knew *exactly* his intentions.

Hands curled even tighter against his hips in almost warning, but he was well past being mollycoddled.

Leveraging himself, Severus lifted hips upward, focusing perhaps overly much on the sudden empty feeling, the overwhelming desire for that fullness – pushing down hard on Remus's leaking prick; gasping out an almost wounded bleat as the werewolf's hips surged

upward and heavy hands slowed Severus's descent, turning the thrust into something that crushed him from the inside out in something akin to ecstasy. The motion left him feeling gutted in the best possible way, pushing all desire from the marrows of his bones as his hormones were finally – *finally* – addressed. All that *want* was finally being beaten back, pushed away and hidden way down deep under his lungs. It didn't matter that the muscles in his thighs were starting to ache, that he would be decidedly unable to sit comfortably the next few days, that he felt heavy and ungainly astride Remus's hips . . . as Severus could finally breathe again.

Well . . . gasp, pant, moan.

Remus's hand curled around his prick, knuckles brushing the underside of Bump and making Severus flinch – all of which was of little consequence as fingers tightened, pushed, pulled.

"Fuck," Severus gasped out again, knees quivering too badly to lift his weight anymore, leaving him to rock pitifully on Remus's cock as the other's hips pushed up shallowly into him.

"Almost," the other promised brokenly, voice dark and husky as if the moon was still tainting his soul, keeping him a wild, dark thing.

A rough palm twisted roughly along his cockhead, fingers tightening almost painfully against his shaft on the downward stroke, loosening on the upward; a thumbnail scraping sharply against his slit, smearing the slick against his head. And that sticky, sweet feeling of bliss was coiling heavy along the base of his spine, pooling leadenly in his hips.

Severus was having a hard time sucking in a breath deep enough, lips busted open so he could pant, fingers curling sharply against Remus's chest. His hips shifting weakly to press more firmly into the werewolf's hand, rocking back to meet the shallow, upward thrusts.

His orgasm felt elusive . . . up until the exact moment that it wasn't anymore. The feeling of it punched into him, pulling hot and sticky from his spine, making Severus grit his teeth against the groan as his hips shifted reflexively into Remus's hand. His moan, low and wet and gasping, echoed off the bedroom walls. The sound of it

mixed with Remus growling, hips rocking against Severus's rump, cock wedged deeply in him as Severus felt his muscles contract against the thick intrusion.

Remus's fingers were wet as he continued to stroke Severus, milking every ounce of the orgasm from him until Severus was a trembling mess, overextended and desperate for more.

"Fuck," he panted out shallowly, flattening his fingers on the werewolf's chest, grimacing as he encountered wet hair, matted with cum. He tried to be embarrassed, having made a sticky mess of the werewolf, but that lolling, boneless feeling of euphoria made it difficult.

"Yes," the other bit out, Remus's tone managing to almost stir arousal in his hips again, setting him alight with desire. There was a promise there, as the werewolf moved under him, manhandling Severus almost effortlessly.

Remus bundled him back onto the bed, hips fucking into him aggressively enough that it left Severus breathless. *Finally*, he thought, even as his higher brain functioning shattered, was left scattered in the messed-up bedclothes. His hands dug into the sheets, fingers knotting. The werewolf shifted him, pulling his knees up higher on his ribs, a hand bracing the other against the bed.

Desire itched hot and heavy along his skin; his hips lifting of their own accord, so Remus could thrust harder, deeper into him; hips rocking against Severus's as the werewolf bottomed out each time.

He whimpered, although he'd never admit it, feeling strung out and overly sensitive – desperate for it, despite the stretched thin feeling. His fingers wound their way into Remus's hair, pulling the other in for an almost kiss – lips pressing messily against one another, sharing the same breath. Cum smeared on Severus's stomach, his chest, transferring from Remus to him. It should have made him grimace, but in that moment it felt right.

A hot mouth pulled away, ran along his throat. Remus was panting, growling out meaningless words. But still Severus was able to pick up on one repeated word – *perfect*.

He whimpered, fingers curled hard into the other's back, nails biting in sharp indentions and drawing blood – which only seemed to fuel the werewolf's lust. The thrusts shallowed, quickened. A hand crushed around his hip, keeping Severus still.

And he agreed – it was perfect. Though he would never tell the Gryffindor that.

Abruptly, Remus pulled out, leaving Severus achingly empty and almost aroused. The werewolf was crushing hips and prick into the bedclothes, rutting and grinding until cumming – which was unexpected.

Sucking in a heavy breath, Remus groped around in the bedside table for his wand and cast a *scourgify* over the lot of them and crawled up beside him in the bed, tucking Severus in against his chest. A nose pressed against his neck at the soft spot behind his ear, and the lycanthrope hummed softly. Severus was certain the other could feel his heart pounding in his chest. A broad hand spread just above his sternum; his chest hitched against that touch.

The content feeling at the back of his thoughts he wasn't entirely sure was solely Lupin's.

"What was that," he finally asked, letting Remus draw patterns along his skin as his heart finally began to slow.

"Ah yes, well. The last time I uh . . . finished in you, we made a miracle. So . . ." Remus trailed off lamely, pressing an apologetic kiss against the column of his neck, nosing against his hair.

Snorting, Severus shook his head as though Remus was being childish, if only to hide the fact he was rather touched at the sentiment. Surprised that the Gryffindor had enough forethought to pull out, especially given a one-time event nearly nine months ago.

Feeling pleasantly exhausted for the first time in a long time – body heavy with satisfaction – Severus let his fingers curl around Remus's forearm, holding the werewolf in place as he let himself doze off.

37 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a head of romaine lettuce

Feeling heavy, Severus sat in Dumbledore's office.

As it was, he had managed to get mostly through his weekly appointment with Poppy before a house elf had appeared bearing the note from the Headmaster requesting his presence as soon as he was able. So, Poppy had of course hurried to finish her exam, told him the dear love was the size of a head of romaine lettuce, had verily demanded he try to eat more, and promptly sent him on his way. He hadn't even been allotted the time to cast the glamor before she was pushing him into the fireplace.

Which was exactly as Albus had seemingly expected it, as Severus had arrived just as the kettle had begun to whistle and yet another house elf popped into existence and out once more, leaving behind a plate of fresh crumpets.

They exchanged mindless pleasantries as Severus sipped his tea, teeth gritted to keep the grimace in as Bump twisted painfully. His hand automatically dropping to rub tenderly at the swell of his stomach, as though he could persuade the devil to relax.

Which seemed to be the opportunity the older wizard had been looking for.

"Have you given my offer anymore thought," Albus asked, pouring them each yet another cup of tea.

"I am not an invalid," Severus grounded out, though a strong cramp seemed to indicate differently. He smoothed his palm along Bump slowly while sucking in a slow breath between gritted teeth. "I am perfectly capable of teaching."

"Poppy said this is week thirty-seven, Severus. We've got to begin thinking about the baby coming." The meddlesome old coot gave him a rather sly look. "I don't imagine you'd like to go into active labor in the middle of class."

Severus grimaced, because as it was – he hadn't given the idea of labor much thought. And Poppy had seemed decidedly uncertain to how his body would experience labor . . . what with the lack of a functioning womb and cervix.

"I really don't think it's going to be that sort of problem," Severus finally managed, picking his words carefully. His stomach cramped up, the muscles of his abdomen tightening until he felt choked before the spasm relaxed. "Rather certain we'll have to cut it out."

"Still. You being on your feet all day surely isn't good for the baby. Undue stress on your body is undue stress on the child, I would imagine."

He gave a snort of derision. "We've gone beyond that, Albus. *Everything* at this point is undue stress on the baby."

"All the more reason for you to allow me to confine you to your rooms." The smile was crooked and bright, and he knew it all too well. Because it was the smile that inevitably led to Severus being conned or manipulated into giving in to the wishes of the old duffer.

"I'm fine. Really." Severus pushed himself to his feet, trying not to puff too hard as the baby squirmed in his guts, and all the blood seemed to rush from his head leaving him dizzy. He stood for a second in front of his chair, fingers splayed lightly on the arm, waiting for the world to right itself. Albus was giving him a knowing look, and Severus glowered. "I am fine," he hissed out, heading for the fireplace – already having decided he would Floo to his rooms and crawl into bed, which he promptly did.

The rooms were blessedly quiet, Remus presumably still at dinner, and Severus traded his work clothes for more favorable pajama bottoms. The waistband clung to his hips, but the fabric was soft and the touch unobtrusive. He crawled into bed, stretching out

leisurely and smoothing his palm along Bump. The baby pushed against his touch, squirmed in his guts. And Severus smiled sleepily.

"I am beyond ready for you to come out, you brat." A sharp contraction tore at him, stirring nausea to life almost halfheartedly. He rubbed both hands along Bump heavily, as though he could entice the baby into stillness.

Severus squirmed and twisted in the bedclothes, pushing the blankets into a nest before nuzzling Remus's pillow. If asked, he would *never* admit to feeling something dangerously close to fondness for the werewolf, even as he pressed his face against the pillowcase and inhaled the other's scent. But as it was, the lycanthrope's heat and smell seemed to soothe the imp in his guts, and himself along with it.

His fingers kneaded along Bump's swell. The nausea, the abdominal pressure, the tightness of his chest was almost bearable, a constant Severus had somehow managed to almost grow used to . . . but certainly would *not* miss once they were no longer an undercurrent in his everyday life.

Sighing, Severus let himself slump in his nest of bedclothes, letting the heaviness take him over.

"Severus," came Remus's voice later, low and anxious in his ear. Fingers pushed through his hair, grasped his chin. "Severus." The tone much more frantic. A weight shifted on the bed.

He tried to make himself respond, offering up little more than a soft sound as he rolled over – feeling beyond heavy, beyond exhausted. Severus coughed, feeling something rattle free in his chest, in that place just under his sternum. He coughed again, fingers knotting in the sheets as he tried to push through the drowsiness.

"Fuck," the werewolf bit out. Hands were pawing at him. "C'mon Sev, wake up."

The lycanthrope was manhandling him, pulling Severus's head into his lap. He was still trying to get his eyes to open. A hard contraction gripped his lower half, clenching tightly all the way

from navel to hips, choking a soft noise of pain from him – hard enough to pull him from that empty, sleepy place.

"Don't call me that," he managed, an eye squinting open to halfheartedly glare at Remus – who audibly sighed with relief, shoulders slumping.

"Slip of the tongue," the other conceded, palm cupping first his jaw and then his neck. "Had me worried."

Severus pushed at the mattress, Remus's thighs until he was in a seated position with his back to the lighter man's chest. His fingers pressed gingerly against his temple, skated along his forehead – where a migraine had erupted, was lingering dreadfully.

"It was just a nap," he ground out, feeling very out of sorts. The werewolf pressed his nose to that soft spot behind Severus's ear.

"I've been trying to wake you for about a day now."

"A day?"

"At first, I thought you were coming out of it, but you just . . . dozed back off? Left me talking to myself." A soft chuckle of almost amusement as arms banded around his chest, Remus's face pressing heavily into the join of his neck and shoulder. "I knew you were tired, but I didn't expect you to sleep that long."

He sucked in a breath, ignoring the notion of laying back down to continue his nap – which had apparently just become an extended period of unconsciousness. "The baby isn't exactly letting me sleep," he reasoned, running a hand through his hair and tiredly sighing. "You know that."

"I thought I was helping," Remus continued, managing to sound like a pouting child - which managed to grate on Severus's nerves far more than usual.

"A few weeks does not make up for *months* of sleeplessness," Severus snapped agitatedly, gritting his teeth and sliding a hand down to cup and rub along Bump as another contraction cramped the underside of his swollen abdomen. Remus fell silent behind him as

broad palms rubbed at his shoulders, fingers kneading heavily as if the other could un-work nearly a year of tension.

"I didn't mean to snap," Severus finally said, letting his tone lilt softly in an almost apology.

"You're tired, I know." A soft kiss against the nap of his neck. "And Bump doesn't help things."

Huffing out a breath, Severus slid his hands down to cup the underside of Bump, letting his thumbs rub softly along the stretched thin skin.

"Teaching probably doesn't help either," the werewolf continued, tone whisper-soft and hesitant. Strong fingers rubbed hard at his shoulder blades, the shallowed furrows along his spine; thumbs kneaded at the base of his ribs, running over the buttons of his back.

"I'm fine," Severus responded far less sharply than he would have liked, plied as he was by the other's heavy, possessive touch – which somehow managed to wear the aches out of him. "The distraction is nice; welcomed even."

"You're exhausted. You spend the afternoons you *do* manage to stay awake during marking essays. Your feet are always swollen. Not to mention your back hurts all the time."

Severus twisted halfheartedly under Remus's hands, making to move away until the other tightened his grip – forcing him to jerk his head around to glare at the werewolf, who seemed rather unimpressed with the dour look. "I would be suffering all that regardless of if I was locked inside my rooms or not," he scoffed, gritting his teeth. Severus pushed on Remus's chest weakly, baring his teeth in a nearly wounded, almost vulnerable expression.

Remus's hands curled around his wrists and hands warmly, holding him still. Lips pressed to Severus's knuckles; a cloyingly sweet sensation settled heavily along his thoughts.

"I just want what's best for you," Remus conceded. "And the baby,

Severus."

Severus let his gaze dip downward, settling on their joined hands as he sniffed in derision. "I think I'll go put the kettle on," he almost whispered, pulling himself free from Remus's grasp.

He overlooked the dizzy feeling that overtook him as he slipped off the bed. Severus managed a few steps forward before the vertigo crushed him, stealing his spine and spilling him unceremoniously to the floor. His jaw clacked shut as it collided with the hard stones; the startled cry from Remus was washed away by static buzzing in his ears.

Darkness settled over him, into him – taking up all the unoccupied spaces.

When he finally came to, Severus recognized the white-washed stones of the Infirmary almost instantly and groaned. He hurried to sit up, fingers grasping at the sheets and blankets to help leverage him. Although, he froze when he met Albus's gaze – feeling as though he wanted to yank the blankets up over his head.

"I've arranged for a substitute," the other started, leaning back and lacing his hands on his chest. "Once Poppy clears you, you'll go on leave. Merlin knows the rest will do you some good."

"Honestly, Albus. That is *completely* unnecessary," Severus hissed, glaring at the Headmaster, teeth gritted. Because, as it was – he rather just wanted to go to his rooms and convince a certain werewolf to rub his back until he melted into the pillows.

A particularly sharp contraction tore at his guts, making him suck in a pained gasp – and earning him a somewhat smug look from Dumbledore.

"Severus," the elder started, sounding rather put-upon. "This is the second time you've managed to find your way into the Infirmary." A sharp look. "And if I know you – which I'd like to believe I do, after twenty years and two Wars – I wouldn't be surprised if you weren't keeping more woes from me. You *will* start your maternity leave once Poppy gives you clearance from these rooms."

"I will *not* have you making decisions for me like I'm still a child," Severus bit out, resisting the urge to cross his arms petulantly over his chest.

Albus heaved a sigh. "Severus. We *both* know you're loathed to admit any weakness. You'd let yourself collapse before you'd accept that you need a break . . . oh wait." A very pointed look. "You *will* take your leave and rest in your rooms, or I will lock you in there myself!"

A throat cleared itself nearer the door, pulling their attention apart – which Severus was grateful for, feeling as though he wanted to leap at the elder which was decidedly a bad idea.

Remus stood awkwardly just inside the door, rubbing the back of his neck anxiously as his gaze flickered between the two of them. Poppy bustled in after him, moving toward the bed and tutting.

"Really, Severus. Just take the damn time off. You need it – and if you don't, you *deserve* it." Her fingers grasped his chin, tilting it upward as she looked at his eyes, inspected a suddenly noticeable bump on the side of his head. She yanked the blankets back, shoved his shirt out of the way, and began inspecting Bump for obvious signs of distress, her fingers kneading along his skin, prodding at organs that had been squished out of place, pressing tenderly at his ribs.

Severus tried to ignore the hot itch of jealousy, focusing his attention rather on Poppy's ministrations.

"The love seems fine. And you," she leveled a sharp look at him. "Besides that damned goose egg behind your ear, and all the weight you keep managing to lose, appear to be fine. Any aches or pains, aside from the obvious?"

"None," he ground out, glaring at Albus as if Poppy giving him a relatively clean bill of health validated his desire to continue teaching. Severus lifted his gaze to Poppy, eyebrows twitching upward in question. "May I *go* now."

Poppy gave him a meddlesome smile. "Of course, Severus. I'm sure

you're anxious to start your leave."

He blanched, giving her a look – because Poppy was supposed to be on his side.

"I want you off your feet and as relaxed as possible until the baby comes." She patted his shin affectionately. "Mister Lupin will take you back to your rooms. Albus will coordinate with the house elves about you taking your meals in your rooms." She beckoned to Remus, who shuffled slowly to his bedside, earning the werewolf a sharp glare.

"I can carry you, if you'd like . . ." Remus said softly, hopefully as his hazel gaze lifted to Severus's.

He scoffed and shook his head, feeling mildly betrayed by the lighter man. Severus pushed his way out of bed and righted his clothing, casting the glamor wordlessly. A hand touched his elbow as if to steady him, though he had yet to stumble, and Severus jerked his arm free of the touch.

"I see my choices are still not my own," he told Dumbledore coolly, taking a small modicum of pride as the Headmaster's smile faltered slightly. He sniffed in dismissal and headed for the door.

As was to be expected, Remus followed him as Severus made his way through the castle, wisely keeping his mouth shut as if afraid that Severus would let his anger at Albus bubble out and burn the werewolf.

"Are you happy," he asked softly as the door to his rooms shut behind them, as he began to pluck his robes open.

"Severus," the werewolf started, but fell silent at the look Severus shot him.

"Don't *Severus* me. That was the one thing – the *one* thing – leaving me feeling normal." His fingers clenched to keep from shaking. "And you had to ruin it."

"You collapsed. What was I supposed to do," Remus said, tone broken open and vulnerable. "Every time something like this

happens, I'm a fucking wreck. I *worry*!"

Severus glanced up at the werewolf as he pushed his teaching robes from his shoulders. "And I get punished because you can't keep your damn emotions in check."

Remus's hand curled around his forearm, tugging him around so the other could stare at him in entreaty. There was the familiar itching along his thoughts, choking him. "You make me lose control, you know that. I thought it was bad before, but now? Literally every thought revolves around you and the baby to some degree." The werewolf had stepped closer, effectively invading his personal space, and Severus drew in a sharp breath.

"You collapsing, not responding . . ." the other leaned in, pressed his face to Severus's throat and breathed. That protective sensation settled heavily in his mind, as Remus wound an arm around his waist as if the werewolf could meld their bodies together. "It destroys me."

He huffed out a breath, trying not to allow himself to be plied and failing. A soft kiss brushed his throat, and then Remus's mouth was on his, sucking the air from his lungs. There was tender passion there, as fingers slipped into Severus's hair, and Remus pressed impossibly closer. Finally, the other pulled back, and Severus opened eyes he didn't quite remember closing. There was too much emotion in Remus's gaze, crushed open and left vulnerable – making his breath hitch pitifully in his chest.

"Is this the part where you bundle me off to bed and have your way with me to reaffirm that I'm *here* like some maudlin romance novel," Severus managed to drawl drily, lifting an eyebrow was as much haughtiness as he could muster while feeling decidedly breathless. Remus's lips twisted in a soft smile.

"Perhaps." The werewolf leered, dipping his face once more to nip and suck and kiss along Severus's throat, somehow making Severus's knees weaker than he would have liked. His fingers carded into greying hair, and he made a sound he would *definitely* never admit to making.

The arm around his waist tightened, that hand rucking up his shirt as a broad, warm palm smoothed along his flank. Remus's lips were on his again, incessant and demanding. And really, it was impossible for his body to not respond to the other's advances, letting his hips crush hard against Remus's, even as his body bowed to accommodate Bump.

They pulled apart, slow and sweet, and Severus tried to ignore the look Remus was giving him – as though the werewolf would open its maw wide and devour him.

"Bed, I think . . ." the other whispered faintly. Severus could almost feel the sonances caress his lips, wet and wanting and just a touch desperate. The emotion at the back of his head had wrapped the protective, possessive emotion in something sweeter than he liked to admit.

"Yes," Severus finally acquiesced, letting his fingers curl and smooth along Remus's chest.

And he let himself be bundled off to bed.

38 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a winter melon

Severus lounged on the sofa, his hands running anxiously over Bump – waiting, while Remus put the kettle on. He had managed to make an effort of some sort, even with the nausea a white-hot thing twisting in his guts in spite of warm hands trying to soothe the baby. All he wanted was his pajama pants and to lay in bed.

Instead – there he was, in linen trousers and a soft cotton shirt.

"It'll be fine," Remus called from the kitchenette. "Stop worrying."

"That's easy for you to say" he huffed, fighting the urge to cross his arms over his chest. Remus would mistake indignance for pouting. "You won't have a Gryffindor brat undoing months of teaching through terror."

He could hear the soft chuckle from behind him, and Severus turned to reprimand – only for the fireplace to belch out green smoke and for Granger to rather unsteadily stumble out.

"Hello professor," she chirped, her entire face softening as she took in his state.

There it was again – that damn body dysmorphia. It was always worse when people spotted his stomach for the first time; eyes going wide, cheeks flushing in excitement, the unmistakable shuffle-step closer as though they would encroach on his space. And it took everything he had to not disappear into the bedroom. Instead, Severus settled for lacing his fingers together over Bump protectively.

"Misses Granger," he said, refusing to call her a Weasley. She gave him a smile – which told him she understood his refusal and accepted. And he decided this might not be such a bad idea after all.

She sat on the sofa by him, a little too close and with hands that looked as though they itched to touch Bump – a look he had learned rather intimately these last few months. Thankfully, the kettle whistled.

"You look so lovely, professor."

He made a noncommittal noise in the back of his throat.

"I tell him that all the time, and he doesn't listen." Remus said playfully, setting a tray down with tea, creamer, and sugar. "Hello, Hermoine."

"Remus," she exclaimed, jumping to her feet and hugging the werewolf tightly.

The little display done, Remus folded himself onto the couch much closer than normal – protective and jealous static hummed at the back of his skull, and he was barely able to contain the smirk. If the lycanthrope were so inclined, he would be able to wrap an arm tight around Severus's shoulders as if to stake claim. At that thought, he was unable to keep the amused snort in.

"And it's true, professor. You're so – soft and relaxed now," Granger carried on, positively gushing. "Do you mind if I . . . touch?"

Jealousy won out, hot and buzzing at the back of his mind. Severus blinked at the intensity of it. "Ah – I'd rather you didn't, I'm afraid. Bump is quite . . . sensitive these days." Remus positively let out a small sigh of relief, which Granger didn't notice, as her face turned red.

"Oh, of course. I'm so sorry, professor – I shouldn't have asked."

"You'll be this way soon enough, I'm sure. The Weasleys are rather notoriously prolific *breeders*," he said drily, smirking. Her blush deepened, but he carried on. "And please, it's Severus at the moment. Can hardly fit into my damn teaching robes, and I do *not* want to have to magic them bigger."

"Too many buttons," Remus said from over his shoulder, his tone – and Granger's blush – implying a leer. Severus fought back his own

blush.

"It's not my fault you're too lazy to appreciate the usefulness of those robes. They rather come in handy whilst brewing dangerous potions," he responded snappily, addressing Remus even as his gaze remained on Granger.

A nose touched the back of his neck, words whispering in his ear so the ex-student couldn't hear. "Rather impractical when I want my hands on you, though."

He was fairly sure his face had flushed, and he cleared his throat aggressively, hands smoothing along Bump in a reflexive motion. "Anyway, we're far enough into the year that the older students are preparing for their OWLs and NEWTs. The younger Years are still . . . somewhat struggling with basic potions but have yet to burn the Dungeons down." Severus rubbed his forehead, suddenly very tired – suddenly very aware of the winter melon sized wad of tissue situated somewhere near his navel. "If you're sure you don't mind," he finally said, giving her a look – one last opportunity to back out if she so desired.

"I'm honored that the Headmaster thought of me, actually. To even be considered for the spot with your skill as a Potions Master is an incredible ego boost."

"Yes, I'm sure you needed that. You always were rather competent at potions," Severus remarked, sipping at a cup of tea Remus had fixed for him. The floral notes of chamomile nearly gagged him.

"You can have my rooms," Remus offered up, shrugging. "I have to stay down here with Severus until the baby's born. They're rather worried about him." A soft pinch to the tender underside of his arm. "He keeps collapsing."

He snorted in derision, turning his head enough to scowl at the werewolf. "That is *hardly* my fault," Severus retorted almost bitterly, though his tone fell short.

"Yes, Professor Dumbledore had mentioned you've been experiencing rather unpleasant side effects," the young woman

piped up, effectively drawing Severus's attention away from the werewolf. "Perhaps it's for the best Remus is down here, looking after you."

Severus rolled his eyes. "The negatives occur regardless of whether or not someone is in my rooms." He rubbed at his forehead tiredly, feeling a desire to let himself sag against Remus's chest. A hand touched his shoulder lightly, and concern buzzed softly at the back of his skull.

Sucking in a deep breath, he offered Granger an almost smile. "Curriculum is in my office, on the desk. Albus already explained to the students that I've a family emergency or some such drivel; they're expecting a substitute." Severus pressed his fingertips to his temple. "All in all, as long as they don't burn the Dungeons down it's fine."

He grimaced as another cramp gripped his stomach, his body bowing reflexively as his palms smoothed along Bump. Remus's hand was back on his bicep, thumb rubbing a small, comforting circle at the point of his shoulder.

"Severus needs his rest, Hermoine. You can come back later if you have questions about the class." While Remus's tone wasn't unkind, Severus could certainly hear the dismissal in it.

"Yes," Severus agreed, finally lifting his gaze to Granger's – unsurprised to see the young woman looking between them curiously. He had no doubt she'd fill the blanks in whatever story Albus had told her quickly. "I need to lie down for a bit, but feel free to stop by after dinner if you'd like."

His hand spread on Remus's thigh, on the back of the couch, pushing and pulling himself upward until Severus had managed to stand. The motion seemed to stir his nausea to life, the feel of it tight and cramping in his stomach, choking in his chest.

As it was, Severus barely made it into his rooms before his saliva glands went into overdrive, effectively pushing him for the bathroom. He turned the shower on, cranking the handle to just under scalding, and climbed in – not paying his clothing one whit of

attention or concern. Sodden, the thin shirt and pants felt too heavy and confining around him, but Severus couldn't be bothered to focus on that as he retched.

The hot water felt lovely on his back as muscles contracted hard, forcefully expelling the contents of his stomach to the shower floor – which resulted only in bloody bile splattering pitifully on the slick tile, promptly washed away by the shower spray. Another set of heaves, a sharp pop high in his ribs that left him breathless, and Severus let himself sink to the floor. His fingers curled against the slick tile. He coughed, choked as he tried to breathe, his body responding with shuddering retches.

His elbows unhinged, and Severus allowed himself to slowly spill to the floor – coughing, spluttering weakly.

The water shut off, and Remus reached in for him. Hands gingerly pulled his soaked clothes away, left them a sodden pile near the drain.

"This doesn't much look like resting."

"Was going to be sick. Shower is easiest for it," Severus gasped out, trying to get at least some limbs up under him. A towel wrapped warmly around him as Remus helped him to his feet, bearing more of his weight than Severus cared to admit.

"Sick? What do you have to be sick on? You haven't eaten anything substantial in days," the werewolf muttered, half-carrying him to bed.

"I think it was the lining of my stomach," Severus groused, allowing himself to be pressed into the bed, covers pulled up over his body, covering the towel. "Did Granger leave?"

Remus crawled into bed with Severus, wrapping his arm around Severus's chest. "Yes. Asked quite a few questions about you . . . us . . ."

"Was always too smart for her own good," he sighed out, twisting in Remus's grip and pushing his head to rest high on the werewolf's

chest. "She'll figure it out; just another maneuver for Albus to push us together."

Fingers pushed and worked slowly through his hair, gently undoing the wet tangles and snarls. Severus rather felt the chuckle more than he heard it. "And would that be so bad? If we were together . . ."

Severus drew in a deep breath, letting himself be lulled by the gentle touches, offering up a soft sound in response. The aching way down deep in his bones had begun to subside – as it was wont to do when Remus's heat wrapped around him. The heavy discomfort resting on his hips, pressing against his spine didn't let up though.

Broad, warm palms smoothed along his back, rubbing firmly over his flank.

"Severus," Remus almost whispered out into the quiet of the bedroom. He drew in a breath and pressed his face closer to the werewolf's throat.

"Hmm." A soft hum of curiosity rubbed along his thoughts.

"I said . . . would it be so bad?"

"Lupin, don't be an idiot." Severus pressed closer, feeling Remus's hand push the towel down, offering up more skin for the other to stroke. Fingers drew slowly along his back in a tender caress that felt oddly reminiscent of the soft, hazy feeling of Lupin's at the back of his skull. "A baby does not equate to a relationship. I keep telling you that." The motion he exhibited was *decidedly* not a snuggle closer, even as Remus bundled Severus against his chest hotly, twisting Severus in such a manner that Bump was not in the way or bearing Severus's weight.

"That doesn't answer the question."

Severus huffed out a breath and rolled over, sliding from Remus's frame and snuggling into the nest of bedclothes. "It's the only answer I'll give you."

The werewolf heaved a deep sigh, and the static at the back of his scalp became more exasperated though no less cloyingly sweet. Remus curled around him, a broad hand wrapping around Severus's hip as a thumb rubbed strongly at the base of his spine.

He groaned as the deep-seated ache began to work itself free, if only for a little while. As if the possessive, heavy touch soothed the baby into slumber. Severus pushed back into that touch, back curling to accommodate Bump.

A soft kiss pressed against the nape of his neck. "I don't think it would be too bad." Lips smeared upward along his neck; a nose pressed into that soft spot behind Severus's ear. A heavy breath puffed against his skin.

"How terribly Gryffindorish of you," Severus grumbled, body shifting slightly in the covers. He wadded them up under the swell of Bump as his damp head lolled against the pillows.

"Insufferably Gryffindorish, I must admit," the werewolf quipped, teeth nipping almost sharply at his skin. "All those maudlin thoughts of romance and that sort of drivel." A hot tongue laved the tingling skin behind his ear.

Severus gave a low snort of amusement, his fingers wrapping around the forearm that banded strongly around his chest. He let out a heavy sigh of contentment, letting his body relax into Remus's heat. "Quite foolish of you." That broad palm rubbed smoothly along his chest before splaying over the almost pounding place above his heart.

"How would you ever survive me," Remus asked softly, playfully. He pulled Severus back against him, smothering all the air between them until there was nothing left; his back pressed hotly to the other's broad chest. A thumb rubbed a small circle above his heart.

"With dark humor and sarcasm," Severus lilted, letting himself accept the comfort of the other's embrace. "And expensive scotch." His hand slipped down to rub aimlessly at the swell of Bump, following the upward curve of his swollen abdomen.

Remus chuckled again, pressing a hot kiss to Severus's shoulder, burying his face in the crook of Severus's neck. "At least I know what to get you as a present then."

Severus snorted again as he rolled his eyes, but any retort was cut short as the werewolf pressed impossibly closer. An arm wormed its way between his neck and the mattress, cradling his head gingerly. Fingers played mindless with his hair.

The other hand slid down his body, fingers pushing between Severus's to cup Bump painfully tenderly. Remus squeezed his hand gently, before relaxing – holding Severus's hand tight against the underswell. A thumb rubbed a delicate pattern against stretched thin skin; the baby pushed lightly against the touch.

And Severus shut his eyes against the emotions that pooled cloyingly sweet, headily at the back of his thoughts, crushing his chest.

39 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a pumpkin

A rather painful bout of cramps had made it impossible to sleep. As it was, Severus had already retched twice – once, whatever tea he had managed to choke down, and the other just foamy, bloody bile. Severus rubbed hard at Bump, the heels of his palms digging in around his ribs to try and quiet the nausea that swelled heavily in his guts, pressing against his ribs and hips incessantly – leaving his chest much too tight. A whimper choked itself out of his throat as a particularly hard cramp left him clutching at the back of the sofa, elbow locked but quivering – the only thing keeping him standing as his knees had loosened traitorously.

"Perhaps you should sit," Remus muttered sleepily from the edge of the sitting room, running a hand through his hair. Severus glanced over at the lighter man – who looked as though he had, and probably had, only just rolled out of bed – and resumed pacing.

"I didn't mean to wake you." He managed a handful of steps before stumbling; Remus's hand was quite suddenly on his bicep, keeping him upright.

"I rather like having you in bed. Of course I notice when you're missing." The werewolf steered him toward the sofa, urging Severus downward to sit. His weight, the pressure of the baby settled overly heavy against his pelvic bone, crushing a sharp whine from his chest – sending him scrambling once more to his feet.

"Severus," Remus bleated out, upset. "You're exhausted. Sit down, for Merlin's sake!"

He gave the other as much of a glare as he could manage as he resumed pacing, keeping close to the furniture, his fingers running along the edges just in case his knees gave out.

"I *can't* sit, Remus," Severus hissed out. His hand came up and

rubbing broad, hard strokes over Bump, kneading the tender skin. "The *brat* is the size of a pumpkin." He drew up short, grimacing as the baby twisted over in his guts, kicking hard against already dreadfully bruised ribs. Severus sucked in as deep a breath as he was able before glaring once more at the werewolf. "The size of a *fucking pumpkin*," he spit out, almost desperate to be bundled under bitterness. "And we wouldn't even *be* in this mess if it weren't for you," he hissed pitifully.

Concern itched at the back of his skull, making him feel much too tight in his own skin. At least they had finally gotten over Remus crumpling like a wet bag every time Severus reminded him that the dreadful situation was the werewolf's fault – which had, admittedly, become more and more often as his due date approached.

"What do you want me to do, Severus. Put the kettle on? Make you some soup? Rub your back?"

Another hard cramp tightened along his guts, and Severus barely had time to turn his head, body bending sharply as he heaved. His entire chest cinched, quivered, ached as he coughed up what appeared to be some of the lining of his throat. Stomach acid left a gritty feeling in his mouth, along the backs of his teeth. His fingers splayed on his thighs, keeping him somewhat in place as he wordlessly cast *scourgify*, cleaning his mess up.

A broad hand smoothed along his back, fingers rubbing deeply against his spine. Severus allowed the touch for a moment, letting himself be lulled as heat seemed to leech out of the werewolf's palm and into the marrows of his weary bones. But then he remembered himself.

Twisting out from under Remus's touch, Severus recoiled like a feral creature, teeth bared. "Kindly don't touch me. We see where that got us last time."

The look on the werewolf's face, the emotions buzzing softly at the back of his thoughts were torn between mild amusement and concern.

"What if we head up to the Prefects' Bathroom. I'll fill the tub,

maybe use some lavender oil." A soft expression overtook Remus's face as the werewolf reached for him. "I'll even carry you, if you'd like."

Severus let himself slump against the chair by the fireplace because it did sound rather lovely.

"I am hardly an invalid," Severus huffed out with less venom than he would have liked. "I can make it to the fifth floor."

Remus disappeared from the sitting room only to return with the coffee scrub and cocoa butter, robes pulled haphazardly around his frame. Severus made himself move toward the doors, allowing Remus's fingers to curl gently around his elbow.

"What time is it," he asked wearily, letting the werewolf drape Severus's robes over his shoulders, the fabric itchy and heavy against his bare skin, already dreading the concealment spell.

"Little after midnight – think we can forgo appearances." Remus tugged him toward the door. "Besides, you'll just be getting naked again in a few moments." Amorous emotions scratched at his skull, headily plastering to the back of his thoughts.

It never ceased to amaze Severus that he could be a swollen, bloated thing of a body and the werewolf still wanted to lay hands, lips, and tongue on him. Because as it was, the longer the pregnancy drew on, the worse Severus felt about himself – dreadfully missing the empty concavity of his belly that matched with the jagged coastline of his ribs, the sharp juts of his hips.

"Ready," Remus asked, situating himself overly close to Severus's being as he pulled Severus's arm across his shoulders.

"As I'll ever be," he snarked back, drawing in a steadying breath before allowing himself to be led from their rooms.

The walk upward took more effort than he would ever admit to, even with his arm around Remus's shoulders, fingers knotted in the other's robes. Even with Remus's arm looped loosely around his waist, bearing some of his weight and propelling them forward.

Severus focused hard on his breathing, on each inhale and exhale . . . his nostrils flared in an attempt to slow and deepen his breathing. Anything to ward Remus from feeling justified in just sweeping him off his feet and carrying him to the bathroom.

At long last – after a small century it seemed to him – they were passing Boris the Bewildered, counting doors.

"Now . . . let's see," the werewolf muttered, facing the fourth door and rubbing his neck in thought.

"You don't know the password, do you," Severus ground out as he mindlessly ran palms over Bump, already dreading the long walk back to the Dungeons. The werewolf gave him a look, as though Severus had interrupted his train of thought, and returned his attention to the door. Severus huffed out a breath, eyes rolling upward.

"Pine fresh," the Gryffindor proclaimed loudly, expectantly – and Severus almost wished the door would remain locked, if only to keep the other from getting a swelled head. However, the password pulled the tumblers unstuck, and the door swung open. Remus ushered him inside, fingers plucking at their robes and leaving them over a stone bench.

"Didn't figure they would change the password too often, but that's what it was when *we* were in school," Remus told him with a chuckle, turning the taps as Severus rested on a bench.

"Of course not," Severus griped, leaning back in an attempt to shift some of Bump's heavy weight off his crushed hips. "Often concussed youths use this bathroom, can hardly expect them to keep up with a different password a month after a few bludgers to the head." He smoothed his hands along his skin. "They probably have a hard-enough time keeping up with their names."

Remus chuckled softly from the edge of the tub, but his attention remained firmly on whatever it was he was doing. Steamy water poured from the faucets, filling the tub. Remus twisted another tap, and the mellow, calming scent of lavender filled the air. The werewolf turned his attention to Severus, verily prowling forward

in an almost predatory manner that Severus had taken to noticing the week before the full moon. And Remus dropped to his knees, fingers curling around the waistband of Severus's sleep pants and choking a noise of concern from him.

"What are you doing," Severus hissed, fingers clutching tightly as Remus's wrists.

Golden hazel eyes flicked upward to meet his gaze, eyebrows lifting curiously. "Undressing you," Remus said softly, cautiously as though he had missed something. "You can't get into the bath with your clothes on, Severus." A beat of silence filled the space between them before the lighter man leered at him. "Or rather, you *can* . . . but you'd have to walk back to our rooms naked."

Severus scoffed. "I'm perfectly capable of undressing myself."

"I happen to *like* undressing you," the werewolf purred, but allowed himself to be pushed backwards as Severus pressed on the other's chest, gaining a meager amount of space.

He got to his feet and – pointedly ignoring the lecherous look the werewolf was giving him – shoved his sleep pants down, wiggling his hips to aid the slide of fabric. Severus ignored the soft heated noise the other made, and the sudden burn of lusting emotions that coated his thoughts.

If he'd been lighter, Severus would have made a dash for the tub – but as it was, his body was rather ungainly and heavy, so he was forced to slowly pick his way across the heated tiles and ease down into the tub. The water was delightfully hot, enveloping him like a scalding hug and leaving him feeling weightless. He groaned in appreciation, back straightening as he stretched. Wet palms slid over Bump slowly, smoothing the tingle as hot water swarmed around tender skin. The water choked the breath from his lungs as it curled around his chest, too hot for him to breathe properly – but perfect all the same. Leaning against the hard edge of the tub, Severus managed to get the coffee scrub open, digging fingers into the coarse grit of it. Water trailed lethargically along Bump, and he wicked them away so he could smear the scrub from hip to hip.

Of course – there was that almost hungry sensation itching along his thoughts as his palms rasped gently against Bump, grinding the grit down into his skin. But Severus ignored it, focusing instead on the bitter, warm scent of the scrub, and the way it felt against his tender skin. Because the grit made his breath hitch, the sound of it overly loud in the quiet room – carried away on wafting steam. The feel of it made his back arch, feeling like his skin was pulled much too tightly over his bones. Severus dipped palms into the water, slowly washing the scrub off, choking out a contented sigh at the feeling of his tender skin slipping slickly underneath his palms.

The hungry, itching feeling at the back of his mind grew headier and headier until it finally broke open.

Remus splashed into the water beside him, flinging droplets across Severus's upper chest and cheek. He glared at the lycanthrope.

"Really Lupin," he drawled. "This is a bathtub, not a pool. Must you splash."

"Couldn't leave you in here by your lonesome – especially when you're making those sounds, looking like you do. Who would wash your back."

"You mean who would paw at me," Severus muttered drily as he situated himself on the bench, his body sinking further into the water until he could feel it pooling in the sharp gouges of his collarbones.

The surface of the water broke apart as Remus moved, pulling Severus's attention to the lighter man. The werewolf settled on the bench next to him, head tilting toward Severus as lips grazed his skin. The other's deep and heavy breathing was suddenly overly apparent in the quiet of the bath.

"Are you sniffing me when you do that," Severus finally asked, ignoring the soft coil of emotion in his chest.

"Hard not to," the werewolf quipped, burying his face in the crook of Severus's neck, body moving closer until the other's furred chest pressed against his back. A hand somehow managed to clutch at his

hip, managing to pull Severus back even tighter against Remus. Hot breath puffed against his neck, eliciting shivers. A hard prick ground against his lower back.

"And what do I smell like." He was curious, Severus would admit . . . especially as it seemed Remus always had his nose pushed up against Severus's skin, breath hot and damp.

"Anise. Cinnamon and cloves. Something muted and sweet, the baby I think." A hot mouth roamed slowly along the side of his neck. "Drives me wild. I want it on *everything*," the other managed to growl out, tone low and husky.

Severus gave a snort of almost amusement, shifting slightly on the bench, in Remus's arms. "You're truly insufferable," he breathed out, words lifting lazily on the steam off the water. The feeling of the werewolf pressing against his back, hot and heavy, was more than enough to remind him how they'd managed to get into the current position all those months ago.

A tongue ran the length of his neck, drifting upward until a nose buried in the hair at the base of his scalp. "Absolutely incorrigible."

He hated what that mouth did to him, the feeling of want that somehow managed to mount in his guts, beating back the nausea. Teeth nipped softly at his earlobe, sucking on the sensitive skin gently. Severus's back curved at the sensation, and he pressed back into Remus's chest as a wet palm smoothed along his flank – the motion absolutely possessive.

"Insatiable," Severus continued, sonances broken apart by a quivering moan. The hand was on his thigh, rubbing upward slowly, pulling his hips back, his leg open. Severus absolutely was *not* blushing – if asked, he would blame it on the hot water, the steam leaving him flushed.

"Blame it on the moon, if you'd like." Teeth nipped at the crook of his neck, mouth open and sucking almost to the point of marking.

It was getting to the point where Severus had absolutely no doubts as to where it was all leading. The hard prick grinding into the base

of his spine was clearly an indicator. The fingers that were teasingly skimming further up his thigh was another. Severus turned his head for a kiss, which Remus happily acquiesced. The angle was awkward for it, but Remus pulled him back further against his chest, and the kiss deepened over the sharp cut of his shoulder.

A muted growl muffled itself against his lips, and Severus drew back quickly. The pressure in his hips was unwilling to be ignored, beaten down by arousal. "Lupin," Severus started shakily, before correcting himself. "Remus. The baby is rather crushing my pelvis so I don't think I can . . ." and he trailed off lamely.

A look of confusion marred Remus's face, before the other seemingly understood and brushed a soft kiss along his shoulder. "Oh. That's fine. I was just going to take care of you, anyway."

"But you're hard," he spluttered out, even as the lycanthrope's hand finally reached its destination, choking a moan from his chest at the feeling of Remus's hand curling around his erection.

"Yes. I do rather enjoy touching you, Sev," the werewolf responded with a snort of amusement. "Kissing you. Hearing you. All very enjoyable to me – I wish you'd believe me."

"Don't call me that," Severus bit out, hand automatically clenching around the edge of the tub as his hips pulled forward with the stroke.

"Severus is a bit of a mouthful . . . and not the good kind," Remus told him softly, lips once more roving along his throat. He let himself slump back into Remus's embrace, focusing on the feeling of that broad palm around his prick. His fingers splayed and clenched on Remus's thigh. Severus completely ignored the soft hitch of his breathing, the whimper a well-placed twist wrung from him, the panting in his ear.

His orgasm was loitering molten and leaden around the base of his spine, cinching and tightening and relaxing as Remus's touch took on a more teasing grip.

"Think you're funny," Severus managed to gasp out, hips jerking

forward even as the werewolf pulled him back tight against him.

"Will you ever believe I like seeing you like this," came the answer in his ear, voice pitched low and heady, much like the burn of want coating his thoughts. But the touch became surer before Severus could choke out an answer – squeezing, stroking, twisting in such a precise way that all the breath dried up in his lungs. Severus pressed back against Remus's chest, mouth busted open as he panted and whined, the slow burn having finally mounted into that white-hot pleasure sparking just behind his eyelids as he came.

Remus pressed tightly against him, hips rocking incessantly while he stroked, wringing the last of his orgasm from him with a soft grunt. Severus felt like collapsing, fingers splayed shakily on the werewolf's thigh, on the edge of the tub.

His thoughts blanked out, turned black around the edges and left murky.

"Merlin, the way you sound," Remus growled softly in his ear, pressing impossibly closer.

He sucked in a heavy breath through his nose, trying to slow his thundering pulse where it pounded in his ears. "Sorry," Severus panted out, feeling shaky and strung out.

"You're perfect, you know."

Severus gave a scoff of disbelief. "I am old and scarred and currently wearing a fat suit – hardly perfect, Remus."

That hot mouth moved along the sharp ridge of his shoulder, nipping and sucking lightly. The werewolf squirmed but remained where he was, and Severus twisted in his grip, peeling his back from the other's chest. Tentatively, Severus let his fingers pull slowly down Remus's chest – taking note as those peculiar eyes drifted shut, and the other offered up a soft groan. Fingers clenched around his hand, stopping the motion with his hand somewhere near Remus's navel.

"You don't . . . I didn't do that for this."

"I know," he responded quietly, resisting the urge to tug his hand free.

A heavy sigh drifted up from between them as Remus pulled him in for a kiss – lips busted open and wanting, all teeth and tongues and passion that left him lightheaded and breathless. Severus allowed himself to be pulled closer before the lycanthrope seemed to remember himself, pulling back hurriedly.

"I can rub your back if you'd like, or your hips." An almost wolfish grin. "You've got the most delightful dimples of Venus, you know." Severus flushed, squinting his eyes shut – the compliment was hard to hear, harder to accept, even as strong hands curled around his hips and pulled him in for another kiss, whisper-soft and hot like a brush fire.

"This is fine," Severus breathed out, resuming his earlier motion. His hand continued to push downward, fingers pulling through and petting hair before finally curling around the base of Remus's prick; the werewolf's hips jerked forward even as his hand curled around Severus's wrist.

"Don't," the other panted out softly. "My hand is just as good as yours."

"Is it," he purred out silkily, giving a twisting stroke that had Remus groaning.

The other bent toward him, back bowing with the motions – lips open as hot breath rushed against Severus's skin as the other panted and groaned. On a whim, Severus carded his fingers through Remus's hair, against the lay at the back of his skull, and pulled him closer, pressing the lycanthrope's face to the unmauled side of his neck. A hand crushed around his hip as Remus pushed impossibly closer, mouth open and hot against the crook of his neck. And Severus rather felt the growl more so than he heard it, where it rumbled up from the base of Remus's chest and rattled against the tender skin of his throat. Lips skimmed along his skin before the other's nose pressed decidedly at the soft spot behind his ear – breathing hard as Remus's hips jerked forward, pressing his prick more surely into Severus's hand.

"Unfair advantage," the other managed to pant out, hips jerking harder with each twist and stroke, his face buried against Severus's neck. Severus somehow found enough air in his lungs to force out an almost chuckle, swept away as he was by the hot burn of *need* thrumming there at the back of his skull. Intimacy was cloyingly thick as Remus pressed open-mouthed kisses wherever he could reach, even as he fucked into Severus's hand and whined.

Severus opened his mouth for some witty retort, only for Remus's mouth to crush against his – the kiss a messy, feral thing of too much teeth and tongue. It caught him off-guard, as the werewolf seemingly tried to crawl into his already occupied lap, hips jerking as he came. Post-orgasm bliss seeped into his thoughts, coiling and pooling at the base of his skull as Remus slumped against him, holding himself upright with a hand on the bench between them. His other hand slid along the sharp cut of Severus's jaw, pulling him closer for a near tender kiss, lips pressing together chastely.

"The last time you touched me, I could barely think straight – the things you do to me," Remus whispered into the air between them, face moving to burrow in against his throat.

"We were drunk," Severus responded airily, drawing in a slow breath – grimacing at the feel of the lukewarm, soiled water on his skin. "And this was counter-productive. The water's dirty and cold."

"You were wanting to get clean?"

"I wasn't planning on you getting in the bath with me." Severus gave the werewolf a pointed look – who gave him a mollifying smile in return.

"And I explained that," Remus spluttered out, a hand over his face as if to hide himself from Severus before a peculiar eye peeked at him from behind spread fingers. "And! I thought we were blaming this on the moon!"

Snorting, Severus rolled his eyes. "The least you could do would be to help me out of this damn tub."

"Yes dear."

"Don't call me that *either*," he seethed, grimacing as Remus helped pull him from the tub – returning the very *real* weight of his body to his bones. The werewolf laughed brightly as he went to fetch a towel.

40 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a watermelon

Severus sat on a bar stool in his laboratory, prepping ingredients for Remus's potion under the watchful gaze of Hermoine. He shifted his weight, trying to find a position where the pressure on his hips would be bearable.

There wasn't one.

"It's very precise," he stressed. "If you were to chop where you should have shaved, the potency of the Wolfsbane could be altered. Which – as I'm currently sharing rooms with the werewolf – I'd rather not happen."

"You're worrying unnecessarily, Severus," the young woman tutted softly, giving him a wry smile. "I've always been a rather good student."

"Yes well . . . you're not the one trapped in those rooms with him once the moon rises, are you."

She gave a snort of amusement, holding her hand out for the knife – which Severus gave over readily, feeling very tired all of a sudden. He watched as Hermoine took up his movements, though slower, occasionally stopping to give him a glance as though she expected him to chastise her at any moment and reiterate the instructions.

"How much longer do you have, Severus? No offense, but you look as though you might explode at any moment . . . or fall over."

He rubbed his forehead tightly. At forty weeks, Severus was well beyond taking offense about comments like that – instead he felt them in his bones. "This is week forty; the baby is the size of a watermelon. Labor should be an any-day-now thing," he quoted Poppy, pushing hair back from his forehead and stretching his back. "Keep chopping; the dittany will brown quickly and be utter trash if

you let it."

Silence spilled in around them, and Severus made sure to carefully watch every motion his ex-student made . . . which was perhaps unnecessary as Granger had always been competent at potions but gave him something to do.

"Are you and Remus . . . together," she finally asked, which Severus had known it would only be a matter of time before she did.

"No," he replied curtly. "Thinner slivers. The aconite needs to be fine; it dissolves in the potion."

Hermonine's motions readjusted, her attention firmly on the ingredients.

"But . . . it's his, isn't it." A beat of silence. "The baby, I mean."

"Hardly any of your business, Granger," he said, tone a low and dangerous purr.

The young woman began cutting faster, the knife whispering through ingredients.

"I know that, Severus," she finally managed. "I just . . ." Her voice trailed off pitifully before she glanced upward at him.

"You just happened to read up on it," he scoffed, hating that the situation he found himself in only had a few causes.

"The Headmaster explained the situation . . . and of course I was *curious*," she stressed, stopping in her motions to give Severus a look.

He swept up the mortar and pestle, holding the heavy stoneware in his hand and regarding the moonstones thoughtfully – at least the present would come in handy. Gritting his teeth, jaw tensed, Severus brought the corundum stick down hard – the moonstones gave way, breaking and crumbling easily. He twisted, bearing down hard – grateful for something to do. "I'm sure you remember that when you're preparing ingredients, you need to conscious of the items you prepare them with. Ash is good for cutting boards – it

reacts with very few ingredients. Corundum is good for crushing – it's hard enough to withstand a beating, nonporous."

"He likes you, you know," she continued, as though he hadn't spoken.

"Dark calls to dark."

"Remus Lupin is hardly a dark creature." She gave him a look, drawing in a sharp breath through her nose before returning her attention to the task at hand. "And simply because you are not always a nice man does not make you a dark wizard."

Severus made a noise of dismissal low in his throat. "You flatter me, Granger – but I assure you, I am quite dark."

Behind them, the door pushed open, and Severus felt that now-familiar wildfire burn of jealousy across his thoughts. Footsteps feather soft as the lycanthrope approached where they sat close together.

"Ah, Lupin . . . come to chaperone?"

Remus's hand curled around the edge of his stool top; the heel of his palm dangerously close to Severus's rump. He could feel the heat of the other's arm just beyond his thin linen shirt.

"I really doubt Hermoine would try and take advantage of you in this state."

The young woman snickered; her head cocked downward as if she could hide her amusement. Which Remus used to his advantage, chest pressing into Severus's shoulder, lips brushing his ear softly. Severus sucked in a breath and cleared his throat. Remus took a single step back, heat still just outside of Severus's rapidly decreasing bubble of personal space.

"Yes. It would be a fool's errand, I believe."

"Insufferably Gryffindorish of her though," Remus countered, tone lilting softly in its humor.

He was suddenly aware of how closely Granger was watching them, as though she had caught the barest hint of their inside joke. Severus ground the pestle down for good measure, twisting sharply and bundling himself away inside neutrality.

"Quite. If you *must* be present, sit. I'll not have you risking my safety because you want to interfere."

Severus flinched when a thumb ran slowly above the waistband of his trousers, leaving a burning strip of skin in its wake. The werewolf leaned against the counter a few feet away, watching them curiously.

"So, Hermoine. Discovered Severus is an acquired taste, yet. Or has he nearly driven you mad with his bossiness and snark."

He scowled at the lighter man, who regarded him with twinkling eyes.

"I find him quite invigorating. Conversation with Severus is rather stimulating."

"You also spend your free time with Weasleys," Severus muttered under his breath, replacing the heavy stoneware on the counter. He ran a hand slowly along the swell of Bump, feeling the baby kick almost lazily against his touch, triggering yet another cramp. Grimacing, Severus tensed his muscles as if he could convince himself to stop quivering. Concern itched its way across his skull like an agitated cat, but Remus didn't move – though Severus could feel that gaze on him, watching, ready to move if needed.

"Perhaps you should lay down, Severus," the lycanthrope suggested softly.

"We're still brewing, Lupin," he bit out, giving the other as hard a look as he was able with a devil twisting angrily in his guts. Drawing in a shallow breath, Severus gave Hermoine a look. "Pay close attention Miss Granger. This is where it gets tricky." Hermoine regarded him brightly, hanging on his words, watching his hands, taking notes as he instructed her.

Four moonstones crushed, sprinkled evenly across the surface; twelve slow counterclockwise stirs over the course of eight minutes; finely chopped dittany, added at a 45-degree angle; shaved willow bark folded in – not stirred; five clockwise stirs – one a minute; eight counterclockwise stirs – one every thirty seconds; two drops boom berry juice; seven stems of aconite, julienned; wait five minutes, color should be pale lavender; three more stems of aconite, julienned; two heavy-handed pinches of ground wormwood, sprinkled evenly across the surface; one powdered scarab beetle; a single drop of moondew, added just above the surface of the potion to avoid splashing; ten counterclockwise stirs over five minutes; rest over low heat until color reached the appropriate shade of silver, offering up a puff of faint blue smoke.

"Let it cool precisely thirty seconds," Severus finally instructed, wordlessly calling Remus's goblet from his desk – the chalice thumping solidly in his outstretched hand. "Ladle." He dipped from the very pit of the cauldron, pouring the still lightly steaming liquid into the goblet before turning to face Remus. "Serve. He drinks it all – once a day for the entire week before the moon."

Obediently, Remus stepped forward, accepting the brew without complaint, letting his fingers whisper against Severus's.

"And it tastes horrible," Remus quipped, giving Hermoine a wink before upturning the chalice and drinking noisily, grimacing once the whole thing had been finished. "Severus assures me that it can't be mixed with an aphrodisiac, but he won't experiment on me."

Hermoine snickered again, rolling her eyes at the lecherous smile Remus was giving him.

"You're not funny . . . that's a pity laugh. We've seen what happens when you're not properly medicated, and that's a risk I refuse to take. Especially now."

"Severus is quite the softie," Remus muttered, leaning in toward Hermoine as though he was telling some big secret, as though Severus couldn't hear every word being said. And he rolled his eyes in almost disgust, although the itch of soft emotions at the back of his skull made it hard to have any real rancor towards the

werewolf.

"Make yourself useful and go put the kettle on," Severus bit out, earning him a soft smile.

"Yes dear," the werewolf quipped, heading for the office door quicker than Severus could hex him and leaving Hermoine to softly grip his elbow and help him follow the quicker man.

"Don't call me that!" But his words were lost, crashing ungainly against the office door as it shut behind Remus's retreating figure.

"You all seem to get along fairly well for not being together," Hermoine told him, casting a sideways look in his direction.

"Bah. All you Gryffindors are the same – looking for foolishly ardent sentiments in nothing but smoke."

"Where there's smoke, there's generally fire Severus."

He rolled his eyes, hand rubbing heavily at Bump as they made their way slowly into his rooms. The kettle was already whistling – not doubt caused by some spell Remus had cast, and Severus found himself rolling his eyes again. *How many times have I stressed the importance of the* Muggle *way when making tea*, he thought to himself dourly . . . even as he allowed himself to be eased down on the sofa by Hermoine and gratefully accepted his cup from Remus.

"You look tired," the werewolf intoned quietly, regarding him curiously as Severus took the first sip of graciously hot chamomile, scalding his tongue and tenderizing his throat.

"Perhaps you should try having something the size of a watermelon sitting in your guts," Severus seethed around his cup rim, dropping a hand to rub heavily at his thigh, stretching his calf out as he winced. As it was, the contractions seemed to have taken up in his legs making it all the more difficult to sleep.

"I meant, perhaps a nap."

"I'm not sleeping. You know that," he finally conceded, feeling very worn out. After nine bloody months of limited sleep, Severus felt

dead on his feet.

"But you could lay down for a bit," Hermoine suggested, seemingly eager to help.

Grimacing as yet another contraction gripped at him, Severus ran his palm over the swell of Bump, thumb running a warm line through the thin shirt. He swallowed against the mounting nausea in his chest, choking him. "I'll just lay there thinking. No, it's best I'm up."

Severus wouldn't admit it, but the anxiety was sharp and brittle in his mind. It kept him up at night; it drove him to madness while Remus slept curled tightly against his back. So, he did his best to relax into his nest and quiet his thoughts. But the words of those dark tomes haunted him – burned their way into his thoughts when the shadows of midnight had pulled long and languid across the bedroom floor.

His pregnancy was full-term.

The nausea continued – but then, more than ever before, there was nothing left for his body to give, worn well past exhaustion, running on sheer determination to see the whole thing through. He had made it forty weeks and would be damned if he simply let his body keel over.

After all, he had spent most of his life forcing himself to survive – another week or so, he refused to let be the death of him.

As if called over by his thoughts, Remus moved closer – their shoulders brushing briefly before personal space was reestablished. "You're rather pale . . . are you sure you're all right?"

He swallowed back another swell of nausea, feeling the baby twist in his guts. Severus splayed a hand on his side, over his kidney. "Just active today – anxious for this to be over, I'm sure. Circe knows I am."

A cramp worked its way across the underswell of Bump, gagging him, and he thrust the teacup sharply into Remus's chest – much to

the confusion of the other, though he accepted the cup. Severus gave him a look as he got rather clumsily to his feet and stumbled for the bedroom. He vaguely heard the werewolf suggesting politely that Hermoine leave just as he shut the bathroom door behind him.

"Oh dear, not this again," the mirror tutted as Severus rushed for the toilet, mouth already pried open heavily as bile tore its way up his throat. His fingers clutched hard at the seat, knuckles cramping from the sharp grip.

The heaves seemed to come from way down in the cradle of his hips, leaving him breathless and hurting.

Moments later the door opened again. Fingers combed his hair back, gathered it at the nape of his neck before a broad palm slowly swept along the quivering, heaving muscles of his back. Though he was loathed to admit it, the feeling of Remus's heat nearly touching his back was comforting. He tried to suck in a breath, only for another heave to choke it from his chest. The sensation of being sick tore at him, leaving him wrung out and wrecked.

"It's all right, I've got you," Remus muttered nonsensically – as though his presence would be enough to ease Severus's sickness completely.

Severus closed his eyes against the mess of blood and bile in the bowl; against the squeezed-out tears that had begun to shamefully trail down his cheeks; against the hot itch of Remus's concern at the back of his thoughts.

Finally, he was able to suck in a breath, nearly retching once more as the air punched into his lungs. Severus sat down heavily on the floor, arse colliding roughly with the bathroom floor as he more like fell backwards from his slumped over position, huddled around the toilet. He collapsed back against Remus, letting the werewolf hold him up.

Quivers had hooked their claws around his bones, leaving him a hollowed out, frozen thing.

Arms looped around his shoulders, banded strongly around his

chest; a palm rubbed slowly over his sternum, as though to slow the thundering pound of his heart. Wisely enough, Remus kept his mouth shut, but Severus could feel the steady anxious hum at the back of his thoughts.

"Surely that must've tired you out," Remus asked quietly, nose nuzzling into the soft spot behind his ear. "You could take a nap. Or how about you just lay in bed, and I rub your back."

Severus made a tentative noise of noncommittal, even as he felt Remus shift . . . pull him upward to his feet. As he let the werewolf gingerly lead him to bed. He crawled into the nest of bedclothes, feeling weak and pulled far too thin – comforted as the mattress dipped under Remus's weight as the other crawled in after him. A broad hand began rubbing heavy circles along his shoulder blades, but it was too much; a gasp of a wounded noise breathed into the air.

Remus immediately stilled, face pressing in tightly against the side of his throat.

"All right?"

"Would you just . . . hold me," Severus whispered out into the quiet of the room – immediately rewarded as a strong, hot arm banded around his chest, pulling him back against the solidness of Remus.

"Of course, love," the other murmured, body curling as tightly around him as possible.

And for once, Severus was too exhausted to rebuke the Gryffindor for his foolish sentiment.

41 Weeks - Your baby is the size of a watermelon

"Oh, you poor dear," Poppy told him, as Severus stretched out on his bed in the backroom of the Infirmary after dinner. Minerva had settled herself at the head of the bed, her fingers smoothing aimlessly through his hair.

"Quite," Severus managed to huff out, feeling the baby twist in his guts. He gritted his teeth against the cramp, fingers knotting in the sheets under him.

"Forty-one weeks, love," Poppy breathed out, as her hands roamed slowly over Severus's stretched tight skin. "We made it." She tilted her head back, smiling at him softly.

"What's the course of action for getting the damn thing out," Minerva broke in, her voice sharp as if panicked on Severus's behalf. And Severus sucked in a deep breath through his nose – because he and Poppy had discussed it many times, had discussed the likelihood of them actually getting to that point. A sharp noise made its way out of his throat before he could stop it – followed by something very close to fear mounting in his chest.

Poppy hushed him, moving quickly to press a comforting hand against his brow before giving Minerva a look. "I have every intention of dragging this out as long as possible – we didn't even know if we'd make it this far, and I certainly won't bollocks it up now by taking the baby too early." Her palm smoothed along his forehead before moving to his chest, spreading over his thundering heart as she spoke her quiet words – as though trying to steady all their nerves. "Babies can't be rushed, love." A stern look in Minerva's direction, properly cowing the Gryffindor. The fingers carding through his hair resumed.

"I merely wanted to know what is planning on being done," Minerva huffed out, gaze downturned to regard Severus.

And Severus drew in a deep breath. "Poppy will cut it out. And this whole mess will be behind us." He rested a quivering hand on the swell of Bump, feeling the baby push at him. "Please continue," Severus muttered weakly, pulling his hand away and leaving his stomach bare where it jutted up obscenely from his ribs.

Poppy stepped away, professional once more as her hands resumed their trek across his aching body once more. She prodded at his organs, overly rough in a way that made Severus squint his eyes shut. Which Minerva seemed to take as a cue for her to speak.

"Have you and Remus come up with a plan – does he know what to expect?"

Severus snorted, forcing his eyes to open as he gave her an amused look. "I think he thinks one day we'll just wake up and there'll be a baby in the room."

Minerva cackled, her unease from earlier seemingly having abated. "That lot never were particularly clever."

He let his lips curl upward in amusement, letting his attention focus on that rather than Poppy casting a spell against his skin.

"He's . . . trying – with all this," Severus finally admitted. The lingering tingle of magic disappeared from his skin, an indication to start the process of getting into a seated position. Minerva's hands helped push him into place.

"Of course, he is Severus. He *likes* you," Poppy stressed, passing him over his shirt as he got to his feet. She gave him a soft smile. "Forty-one weeks; the dear love is the size of a watermelon, and labor could be any day now."

"And it's still crushing my organs," he groused, giving them both a look. "Honestly, you made the right choice to forgo children. This is torture."

Minerva gave another peal of laughter, fixing him with a brightly twinkling look. "Maybe your lover boy will rub your back . . . if you ask nicely."

Severus gave her a sharp look before rolling his eyes and taking his leave of the Infirmary.

Of course, he would never admit to that being the absolute first thing he asked for as he came through the doors to their shared rooms.

Remus gave him a soft look. "Of course – here or the bed?"

"Here is fine," Severus breathed out, letting himself fold onto the couch next to Remus – unwilling to admit that if they went to bed, he might fall asleep. The werewolf shifted behind him, a hard shinbone pressed against his tailbone as heavy hands dropped onto his shoulders, pressing Severus forward just slightly. Contentment settled along his thoughts.

"So . . . I was reading up on some things," Remus started as strong palms smoothed along his spine, and Severus groaned.

"*Merlin* don't just fucking say that," he gritted out from between clenched teeth, the notion of Remus *reading* in an attempt to help him stirring some kind of hormone to life in his stomach.

Those hands paused their motion in confusion. "What?"

"Don't say you've been reading! Stop reading – all together! Just stop." There was confusion rubbing along his thoughts, and Severus glowered darkly at the couch cushions in front of him – cursing the werewolf for trying so fucking hard, cursing himself for finding it harder and harder to not be swayed.

". . . right," Remus finally managed, and Severus was sure the other was uncertain of how to proceed. There was a certain kind of tentativeness that lingered between them as Remus took up rubbing his back once more, the heels of his palms digging in roughly along the cuts of Severus's shoulder blades. "Well, do you at least want to know what I learned?"

He groaned again, fighting the urge to drop his face into his palms. "That's just as bad! Stop it, just stop trying so hard. It's making you almost attractive, and that's what got us here in the first place!"

Well . . . that, a bottle of nice blended malt, and the undeniable urge to be properly fucked.

"So . . . then shouldn't I keep trying," Remus asked softly, face pressing against the crook of Severus's neck affectionately.

"No," Severus bit out as angrily as he could. Which, admittedly, fell short what with the lycanthrope was trying to be annoyingly, endearingly helpful. An exasperated breath puffed against his neck as Remus straightened, digging fingers down into Severus's tired muscles.

"So, the book said," a pause as Remus chose to overlook the soft noise Severus emitted, "that warm baths relieve stress and encourage your body to release oxytocin which could induce labor."

Severus groaned in resignation, letting his head drop forward. "And proper pronunciation? Oh, fuck me. You have got to stop."

"Actually," the other continued, taking on what could have been considered a lecturer's tone – which managed to drive Severus just a little madder with want. "Sex was the first suggestion, but you had said the baby was crushing your pelvis, so I thought . . . better not. Figured around midnight or so, we'd head up to the Prefects' bath for a good long soak."

"Just shut up and rub," Severus ground out, back arching and pushing against Remus's palms. "Harder." The bright, licking feel of amorous emotions burned along his thoughts, making him flush because he already felt like gunpowder just waiting for a spark.

"As hard as you'd like until you want me to stop," Remus purred out against the tender skin of Severus's throat. Which pointed at so much more than just a simple backrub, and Severus had to *remind* himself that he currently had a watermelon sized mass crushing his pelvic bone and that fucking on the couch shouldn't be high on his list of things he wanted to do. But the lycanthrope was good to his word, rubbing Severus's back heavy and slow, even though his hands must have cramped up at some point. But Remus continued to work tirelessly, which Severus was exceedingly grateful for – as nine long months' worth of aches and pains worked themselves free.

Severus let his head loll forward, pressing back against Remus's chest. Hands slipped around his ribs and held him banded against the werewolf's chest. The other's nose pressed to that soft spot behind his ear. He picked up one of Remus's hands and rolled the muscles under his fingertips, having known the hurt of building muscle memory.

"I'm sure your hands hurt," he breathed out, as close as he could make himself get to uttering an apology. Severus kneaded muscles and tendons roughly, feeling the bones roll between his fingertips.

"Would you believe me if I said you were worth it?" A soft kiss pressed against his throat, and Remus's hands twisted under his until their fingers were slotted together.

Almost desperately, Severus wanted to ask if the other would mean it regardless, or if it was just another Gryffindor hubris of loyalty for him due to a situation neither of them had asked for.

But instead, he made a soft noise of noncommitment low in his throat.

"You look like you're falling asleep," Remus breathed in his ear while the feeling of lazy satisfaction drizzled itself over his thoughts warmly.

"Holding out for the bath – need to see if all that book-learning pays off."

Remus gave a puff of laughter against his throat, laid it among soft kisses. "Up, then. We'll go ahead and go – Merlin knows it will take us long enough to get there," the werewolf teased.

"Shut up," Severus bit out without much bite, huffing as he got to his feet.

An incredibly long walk up five flights of stairs later found them in the Prefects' bath. Severus was still feeling properly worn out, his body pleasantly heavy from where Remus had worked all the knots free. He rested on a bench while the lycanthrope messed with the bath taps, feeling like he might fall asleep as the air turned humid

with steam.

"C'mon you," Remus muttered softly, affectionately as he pushed at Severus's clothes – left them a pile on the floor – and led Severus over to the tub. Hands held his biceps tightly as Remus helped him down into the water – blissfully hot where it sucked in around him.

And so, Severus found himself on the stone bench of the prefect bath, hot water up around his throat and bracketed by Remus's widespread thighs. Severus shifted, canting his hips upward and grimacing as the muscles of his abdomen clenched. His hands worked their way down along his sides heavily, soothing aches. Remus's hands ran slowly through his hair, nails scratching at his scalp delightfully as the other droned on about some mindless story – something about a Fifth Year Hufflepuff and an unhealthy fascination with vampires and werewolves.

"Said it's about a teenager trying to decide to spend the rest of her life with a vampire or a werewolf. Which seems like a horrible idea! How did these novels manage to become such widespread things?"

"Trashy romance will always be a big seller," Severus responded tightly, leaning back against Remus's lap, arching into the touch as he rubbed Bump aggressively. His fingers kneaded along clenching skin, trying to ease the cramping.

"Then you should be more accepting of my advances," Remus snorted, fingers scratching delightfully at his scalp.

"This isn't a trashy romance novel, Lupin. It's real life." He huffed out a deep breath as he twisted on the stone bench, wishing the water was just a little hotter – because as it was, it was encroaching a very lackluster lukewarm. "With a baby on the way," Severus bit out, eyeing the taps warily.

Severus mentally recounted all the pros and cons of moving, of dislodging himself from the comfort of the werewolf's lap to pour scalding water into the tub. Both lists seemed to be of similar points, until he finally made up his mind. Groaning, he pushed himself forward, fingers clenching at Remus's knees to get the proper momentum and made his way to the taps. The water rested

high on his chest, thoroughly covering Bump and leaving him feeling more weightless than he had in a long time – in forty-one long, *long* weeks.

Hot water cut a burning ribbon into the bath, giving up steam like a breath and sucking a vortex down into the tub. Heat leeched outward. Heaving a grateful sigh, Severus let himself slump against the tub wall, fingers curled around the edge as his shoulders slumped. The hot water was already reaching out to push against him, pressing through the cooling bath to wrap warmly around his weary body.

Anxiety was gnawing at him, as it always was – as though labor was just around the corner. And he would readily accept it, if only it would come.

"Should I move by the taps, then," Remus asked, pulling Severus's attention over his shoulder to glance tiredly at the werewolf.

"If you want to touch me, yes."

A bright grin split Remus's lips and the other scrambled to his feet, walking briskly across the room to plop down on the edge of the tub once more. His feet settled on the bench, legs spreading with an expectant look.

"C'mon then. I'll rub your shoulders and neck."

"Eager, are we," he said drolly, even as Severus made his way over to the werewolf's new spot.

"When it comes to you, always."

Severus snorted as he situated himself on the stone bench, arms draping limply over Remus's thighs. Immediately, the werewolf's fingers were in his hair, pushing his head forward just slightly from the pressure. Thumbs worked circles at the base of his skull, where his neck connected as Remus continued his story. Severus was content to let the other ramble, only half listening and making vague noises in response, letting himself be lulled by the contact. Nails scraped roughly against his scalp, raking through his hair. He

let his head loll, thoroughly enjoying the heavy hands in his hair.

"You're not even listening to me."

"Of course I am," he replied defensively – though for the life of him, Severus couldn't remember the last words out of the werewolf's mouth.

There was an amused snort from behind him.

"Anyway . . ."

He let his attention drift once more as Remus picked up the story where he had left it, thumbs working their way down along the back of his neck, pushing heavily at his spine. Severus groaned, arching his neck to silently request more of that touch.

"Do you . . . regret it."

The statement knocked him from his stupor, as hands fell still on his shoulders and Severus became rather aware that a *very* real question had been asked. Though surprised, he kept his head canted forward, gaze closed in faux relaxation as his mind hurtled through all the possible things he had missed.

"Be more specific, Lupin."

"Keeping the baby. Us."

It was certainly not the question Severus had been expected, and it shocked a bleat of a surprised noise from him. Which prompted Remus to hurriedly explain.

"It's just . . . ah, well it seems to be taking quite a toll on you." The kneading of his skin resumed, strong fingertips bearing down hard along the sharp cuts of his shoulders.

"Yes well, after forty-one weeks of it, I hardly doubt anyone would come out none the worse for wear."

A bead of silence dropped between them, spreading outward like oil on water before being swept away.

"That doesn't answer my question, Severus. I've seen you starve, retch, collapse. I've seen the madness of your sleepless nights." A soft tug at his hair. "Do you regret it?"

Sniffing in deeply through his nose, Severus sat for a moment – quiet and seemingly pensive, as though in great thought. Another sharper tug at his hair.

"Severus!"

"No, Remus. I don't regret keeping the baby. I never expected to make it this far in life, as it is. Having a real family might be nice."

"Does that mean you don't regret us."

He twisted his neck to look back at the lycanthrope. The other's eyes were bright with hope, and Severus lifted a haughty brow. "I thought you were rubbing my shoulders."

Remus heaved out a sigh, but the touch resumed. "You're insufferable."

Severus waited a moment, allowing the silence to soak between them – reveling in the feeling of the strong touch wringing the hurt from his bones. "We were drunk, Remus. Things happen." He sniffed, letting himself lean back into the lycanthrope's touch. "But I don't necessarily regret it. To regret it would mean I regret the baby – which would negate the original answer . . . which would make this whole conversation utterly pointless." Severus twist his neck to give the lighter man a pointed look. "And you know better than to waste my time."

The werewolf was silent, as though he was unwilling to dig himself a deeper hole. And Severus relaxed into it.

Before long though, after rubbing his fingertips together found them sufficiently wrinkled, Severus pushed himself forward again with a groan. He grimaced as a contraction cramped at his abdominal wall. Already, Remus was pulling his feet out of the bath and situating himself on his knees just beyond the tub edge – hand outstretched, fingers splayed. Severus clasped his hand and let himself be mostly

pulled from the bath, helping as much as he could when the lingering water felt like a lead cloak around his shoulders.

He swept up a towel and began to dry his chest, shoulders, and Bump, trying not to flinch as Remus dried his legs and hips. The towels dropped and Remus's palm smoothed along his thigh for a brief moment before the other's shoulder pressed sharply into his back – offering stability as he lifted first one foot and then the other as he dressed. But still, Severus's fingers curled around Remus's shoulder, knotting in his shirt. The thick sleep pants were the ones Remus had gifted to him – his obvious favorites by now – but like always, the lycanthrope curiously held his tongue and didn't mention them.

The silence was almost uncomfortable, and Severus found he had the urge to say . . . something.

"Remus," he said quietly, squeezing the other's shoulder to get his attention. Peculiar hazel eyes glanced upward; eyebrows cocked in question. "I don't regret the baby, or the one-night stand that caused it." Severus drew in a deep breath, releasing it in a huff. "And I must admit the last couple of months have been," he paused, searching for the right words – well aware of Remus's gaze on him, hope burning wildly at the back of his thoughts. "Almost pleasant, given the circumstances."

The werewolf grinned, back promptly straightening as he tried to capture Severus's mouth in a kiss, which Severus held at bay with the hand still clinging to Remus's shoulder.

"Of course, I still won't be swayed into your Gryffindorish thinking of things and create a relationship between us just because we share a child," he sniffed, reaching for the thin shirt crumpled on the bench. Severus spread the light fabric, stretching it around his forearms before pulling it over his head, past his chest, and down around Bump. The lightweight weave stretched comically over his belly, accentuating the swell of it, the button of his bellybutton – and Severus wondered what it would be like for his body to once more be solely *his own.*

"Of course not," Remus deferred teasingly, though Severus found the

werewolf was rather unsuccessful at trying to tamp his feeling of hope down. A broad palm gave Bump a tender rub before Remus's arm slid under his shoulders to grip at his upper ribs. "Shall I get you to bed, then."

Severus scoffed softly, but nearly sighed with relief as Remus tugged him toward the door.

The walk downward to the Dungeons was – as it always was as of late – a small, bone-crushing eternity, where every step made him more and more aware of just how heavy his body was; how *there* it was. The baby had firmly settled in his lower half, crushing his pelvic bone.

Severus rubbed his hand slowly along the swell of Bump, wishing the exhaustion in his bones would leech out into the amniotic fluid and still the baby's twisting, if only to give him a moment's rest. Instead, a sharp contraction made him stop and suck in a breath. Remus accommodated his need for stillness, resting him between the wall and the other's broad chest as Severus dutifully grimaced and rubbed hard at the underswell of Bump. As it was, the imp would not be dissuaded. Severus squinted his eyes shut tightly, drawing in a deep breath through his nose as though he could mentally struggle through the hurt just south of his ribs.

"We've all the time in the world," Remus told him, leaning forward to press their chests together. "No rush."

"And when the students come down for breakfast, and we're still making our way back to the rooms," he gritted out, earning him a chuckle from the werewolf.

"You're rather decent at lying."

Rolling his eyes, Severus beat the ache away and pushed forward out of the werewolf's touch, taking a few steps unaided before Remus's arm was back – as though he didn't trust Severus to make it to their rooms by himself. Which admittedly, Severus didn't either. Remus's arm was wrapped around him – holding him up, though Severus was loathed to admit it. And he allowed himself to slump into the other's embrace, letting the lycanthrope support him more

thoroughly.

Pitifully, Severus counted stairs, lamenting each floor they still had to descend – cursing Slytherin House for being situated in the Dungeons.

"Almost there," Remus told him, fingers squeezing high on his ribs in reassurance. "Just this last set of stairs."

Severus made a noncommittal noise high in his throat, more than ready for his bed – which lay just at the end of a final staircase down into the Dungeons and down the hall a bit.

But of course, Fate – as it always did – had different plans for him.

They nearly collided with Ainsley, and Severus had to bite back the groan of defeat. Because as it was, in that glorious time after midnight – he had forgone his robes and the concealment spell, as he had done for the last three weeks, confined to his rooms.

Remus's arm tensed heavily around his frame, suddenly uncertain as they all recoiled.

"Sir," the prefect chirped, surprised but seemingly grateful that Severus had been the one to find him wandering the halls well past curfew.

Of course, Severus could see it the moment the Fifth Year took in his widely swollen abdomen, the werewolf at his shoulder. Surprise edged the lines of the youth's face, mouth opening before closing quickly, teeth clacking audibly.

It was hard to tell if the thick concern suddenly swamping his thoughts was Remus's alone. Because the anxiety he felt certain compiled with the concern that the prefect would share his secret – which was blatantly obvious in that moment. The thin cotton shirt was stretched rather pointedly over Bump, accentuating the swell and showing off the small knob of his belly button.

The air withered in the landing, sucked from between them. Even the baby had stilled in his swollen belly, as though all the world as they knew it was suddenly holding its breath.

"Ah . . ." the youth finally breathed out, blinking rapidly.

"Mister Ainsley," Severus drawled, trying for as aloof a tone as was possible. The heaviness of concern, of apprehension was flooding his skull as Remus's emotions ran the gamut before settling somewhere near fiercely protective. "Unless I've suddenly forgotten how to tell time, I do believe it's past curfew," he said drolly, trying to dissuade the werewolf from doing something rash by pressing his elbow into the other's ribs sharply.

"Are you . . ." but the sentence cut itself off, the prefect once more stared pointedly at his swollen abdomen before lifting a curious gaze to his.

With a noncommittal noise, Severus smoothed a hand along his side where his bruised kidney lay, as there was no sense in pretending. Instead, he turned his attention to rubbing Bump into placation as another contraction cramped his insides viciously. Severus scowled at the floor, palm smoothing along the underswell of Bump. Which Remus took as an indication of discomfort with the situation, and suddenly Severus found the werewolf had propelled himself forward, grabbing up a handful of the student's robe, pulling Ainsley decidedly closer. He leaned into the boy's space, something like a growl trapped in his throat.

Something wildly protective was itching across his thoughts – as though the wolf had been prodded from the corner of Remus's psyche.

"You won't speak a word of this," Remus growled, low in his throat, teeth almost bared in a snarl.

While Remus's curse wasn't exactly broadcasted, the students who needed to know – namely the prefects – had been told about the werewolf's secret. And Severus could see the almost stricken look Ainsley was giving the Gryffindor, as though the youth expected a bite any moment. The student craned as far away from Remus as he could, giving Severus a pleading look. The prefect whimpered out a noise that might have been an agreement, but Severus couldn't have the lycanthrope bullying his students. He heaved a deep sigh and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Lupin," he bit out sharply, trying to call the other's attention back to him. "Leave the boy alone."

Severus drew in as deep a breath as the churning in his stomach would allow. His back curved a bit as a contraction overtook him, thoroughly calling Remus's attention back to him.

Suddenly the arm was back, wrapped tightly under his shoulders and almost immediately resuming its job of holding him up. Severus ran his palm along his forehead roughly where a migraine had begun collecting.

He merely wanted his bed . . . and it seemed further away than when they had first left the bathroom.

"Visiting Miss Pearce," Severus finally asked, giving the still surprised youth a look, voice choked tightly as he tried to ignore yet another contraction. *Poppy is a damned fool if she doesn't think they're close enough together to indicate active labor*, he thought, scowling.

"Yes, Sir," Ainsley confided, admitting quietly to having been visiting a certain Ravenclaw sweetheart. The look on his face was pale with concern. "Are you all right, Sir."

Severus could almost see the tumble of Ainsley's thoughts, his concerns, and he merely waved it away. "I'm quite used to it, by now." Absentmindedly, his hand resumed its slow rubbing of the swell of Bump as he focused on his breathing. He squinted as yet another contraction cramped its way across his swollen abdomen.

"C'mon, Sev," Remus murmured low in his ear, shifting to get a better grip under Severus's shoulders.

"Don't call me that," he protested weakly, even as Severus slumped against Remus's arm.

Another arm wrapped around his waist, taking more of the burden of his weight, and Severus startled. He glanced to his side, where Ainsley had wormed in close to support him.

"I agree, Sir. Let's get you to your rooms."

The hot wildfire burn of jealousy scraped at Severus's thoughts, though Remus wisely kept his mouth shut – as though he was grateful to share what must have been some of Severus's heavy weight. And in silence, the trio of them managed to descend into the Dungeons, to make it to his rooms.

At his doors, Severus drew himself tiredly from his support system and gave Ainsley a look. "Thank you, Mister Ainsley . . . I trust you will find yourself to the Common Room on your own."

The youth nodded eagerly, as if to appease. "Of course, Sir. Right now." Remus gave an almost growl low in his chest, calling the prefect's attention to him. "And in silence," Ainsley continued, though it could have meant anything. Severus leant against the door watching as the boy heading off deeper into the Dungeons – heading for the Common Room and the Dorms beyond.

"That could be trouble," Remus intoned, once more wrapping his arm under Severus's shoulders, taking the brunt of his weight. Severus charmed the doors open and forced himself to move into their rooms, pulling the werewolf with him.

"Indeed."

42 Weeks - Your baby is past due

"Can't believe that's all she had to bloody well say," Remus seethed, his words harsh in contrast to the gentle hands that lingered, keeping Severus moving – waddling – along to their rooms, well past curfew when the contractions had refused to cease and instead had morphed into one on-going roll of clenching muscles.

"Your baby is merely past due, these things happen Severus," the werewolf mocked, head wobbling on his neck. "It needs to come *out*," he snapped.

"Really, Lupin – you're making a bigger deal of it than it is. I'm fine," he breathed out, though the name slip showed his discomfort. Even his hand rubbing continuously against his belly did nothing to sway Bump's mind about twisting viciously.

The doors fell open as he managed to gasp out "crocodile heart," admitting them inside. Where Remus promptly started on his robes, undoing buttons painstakingly by hand even though he knew the spell. Muttering, *growling*, all the while.

"It's killing you, Sev. You need Bump to be Baby. You needed it like . . . three weeks ago. Maybe more."

He did feel rather lightheaded, weak. Severus's fingers grabbed at Remus's forearm, a sudden need to steady himself rising from quivering knees. The lighter man steadied him; eyes focused on Severus as Remus's hands clutched at his robes for stability. The heady thrum of devotion, protectiveness rubbed at the back of his skull.

"Would you put the kettle on," he asked, as nicely as he could as Bump twisted painfully hard in his innards. His breath was short,

sharp as Severus focused on the floor in front of him, making himself move slowly into the little eating nook. He touched his face softly, skin somehow clammy but feverishly hot under his touch.

Remus turned away, filling the kettle and still chatting away. "I mean, really though Severus – I'm fairly sure the Muggles just make the babies come out if they stay inside the mother too long. The Wizarding World should have the same. Forty-two weeks of this is *quite* enough."

He swayed for a moment, drawing in as deep a gasp of breath as Bump would allow.

"I agree with you," Severus said, voice stretched thin and soft with pain; his fingers outstretched and balanced against the back of a chair. He swallowed hard, fighting down the hard, constant contractions in his stomach. There was a brilliantly sharp pain somewhere under his ribs, as though his spleen or some other rather unimportant organ had ruptured. His bones quivered finely; his skin crawled; a hot, leaking sensation flooded him – as though he had pissed himself, but someone had forgotten to tell him.

"Remus," he said softly, but the rest of his sentence died on his lips. There was a peculiar look on the werewolf's face as the lighter man glanced over his shoulder.

"Severus," the word was sharp, almost panicked.

That's the oddest feeling, Severus thought at the sensation buzzing angrily at the back of his skull – even as his vision turned dark at the edges and his knees finally unlocked.

And Finally, It Ends...

Watching Severus crumple – Remus would have thought – should have been the worst of it. But as it turned out, every second afterward surpassed it in ache. While it should have only taken seconds to reach the darker man, it felt like hours. The dungeon floor bit harshly at his knees. "Severus," he said sharply, his tone turning almost desperate. His fingers cupped the other's face, trying to smooth away the angles and lingering pain. And when Severus should have responded to his calling, and didn't, the suddenly slow progression across the floor felt unimportant. That dark head lolled on a boneless neck.

Severus was all sharp angles and unpredictable lines as Remus tried to corral the darker man into his arms. He finally managed to get his arms around Severus, bundling him tightly against Remus's chest. He tried to swallow down the feeling of terror bubbling up from behind his breastbone as he stumbled almost lost through the castle. His chest cinched up tight as the Infirmary came up empty. The terror simmered down into panic as Poppy finally emerged, even though her face white with the sight of them.

"Out," Remus positively growled, his body trembling. "I don't fucking care if it's not ready! *Cut it out* ."

"Get in the backroom," she said softly, voice choked and eyes wide.

He stumbled across the floor, carrying Severus with as much tenderness as he could, while he felt as though he'd fall apart. Severus had managed twenty years pulled in two, but there was something repugnant about death coming from within.

"Severus," he groaned, face in the other's neck as Remus spilled him upon the bed. "Severus, please," he whispered, nosing at the other's neck – only vaguely aware of the high whine building in his chest.

"Go get the Headmaster," Poppy snapped, her fingers grabbing hold of Remus's arms. She shook him, trying to get his attention, and

finally that hazel gaze lifted to hers. The look was uncomprehensive.

"But," Remus started, teeth worrying at his bottom lip.

"Now," she ground out, pushing the werewolf toward the door. For a moment, she didn't think he would actually leave, but then the lighter man was nearly fleeing the Infirmary. "Oh Severus," she gasped out, eyes filling with tears as she looked the dark man over. They had expected it she tried to remind herself, but it hurt as it always did. "You poor dear." Severus was all a tangle of robes and long limbs as she fought to undress him.

While it hadn't happened often, there had been a few times when Severus had collapsed during the Dark Lord's reign – turned a ragdoll by pain and exhaustion. It was hard work. Hard work that she never thought she'd have to do again – to get him undressed so she could survey his belly. They'd stopped by earlier, Remus distraught with Severus's discomfort, and she had tutted away the werewolf's fears. Severus's discomfort had been a constant since the start; it had been expected. More than that, it had been accepted. So, she had explained babies couldn't be rushed and sent them on their way.

Which had *apparently* been the wrong assessment. Because she could see Bump twisting just under the stretched taunt skin, and Poppy cupped the distended belly, trying to soothe the motions. "There now, love," she started. "We'll have you out in just a bit." Her gaze strayed to Severus's all too still face. And while they had conversed at length about the risk he was taking, she had never really thought it possible. After all, as Severus had stated a Dark Lord had tried and failed to destroy him, though the infant seemed to be doing a well enough job.

Her fingers pushed through his hair as Poppy waited, rather impatiently, for Dumbledore. Not that the Headmaster would be helping with the operation, more that he would be responsible for . . . containing Remus. Of course, it was rather unfortunate that there hadn't been time to tell Minerva as well, and Poppy hoped the other would forgive her that indiscretion.

About then the pair rushed through the door, and she nodded to Albus.

Severus was just a dark spill on the bed as Remus rushed into the room. There was that panic again, churning full force into terror at the sight. Instinct pulled him forward, but Remus found himself stopped short, Albus's hand tight on his forearm.

"We'll just stand right here, Remus. Poppy, please proceed. Our dear boy looks as though he's getting weak." Which was true, even though the thought terrified Remus. Severus's pulse fluttered lackluster along the long, pale line of his throat, as though all the fight had gone from his body. *Forty-two weeks, just a little longer,* he thought, pleaded in his mind. There was that wildfire heat of jealousy as he watched Poppy's hands move over Severus's distended belly. As Poppy pulled the scalpel down along his taunt skin, drawing a long slit. And Merlin, he hadn't expected so much blood. The thick copper-rust scent of it knocked into him, making his head spin dangerously.

Only Dumbledore's firm hand kept him from spilling to the floor.

He was whimpering, he knew. Everything in him hurt, positively ached, for Severus.

Poppy was well aware that the surgery wasn't supposed to go quite like that. But the situation was far odder than most. If it had been a normal cesarean, the slit would have been lower, more centrally located. Her friend Alice, a mediwitch at St Mungo's, had explained the concept to her. But as it was, Severus was decidedly male. And therefore, lacked a womb. So, she had drawn the blade razor-sharp and whisper-soft from above his belly button down nearly to his belt, following the linea nigra. Blood had bubbled over her hands, hot and wet, and Poppy had hurried to put the scalpel down lest it slip in her slick grasp.

Her hands shook dreadfully as she pulled apart the skin, the muscle. Thankfully, the baby lay twisted on its side, curled up in Severus's intestines like some sort of tumor wadded up in his organs. From somewhere over her shoulder, she heard Albus mutter *petrificus totalus* , then the Headmaster was at her side. His hands were

reaching into Severus with hers, plucking the baby away, pulling at the placenta. She snipped the umbilical cord, binding it up tightly with a torn cloth before Albus stole the baby away. He smacked the baby on its bottom until it squealed and cried, a bright sound. It sucked in breath and squirmed in Dumbledore's hands. She glanced back at Remus, knowing the poor dear would have spilled to the floor already if not for the curse holding him in place.

With the care of the baby relinquished to Dumbledore, Poppy focused solely on Severus. Ulcers dotted his abdominal wall, ate holes in his stomach. There was bruising, deep and painful, on his liver and his kidney. Just on the other side of his ribs, where the muscles had worn thin, she could see fractures there. His spleen had ruptured, and she merely took it out. And there was so much blood, as she tried to be as gentle as possible as she put his body right, but there was panic mounting in her chest. Because all the hurts she had seen and healed in the years before held a very dim candle to what she was seeing in him then. She was trying desperately hard *not* to notice the rise and fall of Severus's chest slowing, as she sopped up blood as best she could.

"Poppy," Albus said sharply, giving her a look, the baby swaddled against his chest.

"Right," she muttered, reaching for the long, hooked needle and thread.

Remus wanted to retch, watching Poppy pull the thread through Severus's skin – like black spider legs washed in blood, climbing through alabaster. He couldn't even bring himself to be in awe of the miracle Dumbledore held. His entire attention was focused on each carefully precise stitch, on the almost hurried way Poppy pressed a bottle to Severus's lips once finished.

A zipper , he thought numbly, staring at the knots of thread, *holding Severus together* .

He was whining again, sharp and loud. Remus collapsed as the full-body curse finally disappeared, as he was allowed to nearly crawl toward the darker man supine in the bed. His fingers clutched hard at Severus's, watching as Poppy wiped around the string of dark,

thick thread, smearing iodine around the closed wound. As she again pressed a bottle rim to Severus's lips, pouring what looked like a healing potion into his mouth. Remus swallowed thickly; face buried against Severus's neck.

"You may join him on the bed," Albus finally said, shuffling closer with the tiny human still tucked against his chest. "It would be easiest for you to hold her if you do."

Weakly, Remus pulled himself onto the bed, trying to touch Severus with every line of his side. "Her," he said softly in wonderment. For some reason, the gender had never mattered much to him – the baby was *theirs* , which was more than enough for him.

"Skin on skin is very important to an infant," Poppy muttered, tone absentminded and soft, as her hand smoothed back Severus's hair.

He told himself she was only trying to help, beating back the jealous wolf in his psyche as he undid buttons on his shirt. Remus balked a little as Albus handed over the baby, still pink and wrinkled, her tiny mouth drawn up in a whimper. Curled on the bed, the barest weight of the babe on his chest, Remus only had eyes for Severus. He was vaguely aware of Minerva coming into the room, of the three of them crowding around the bed, to aww over the baby, to tut and make over Severus. He ignored them, his hand resting against Severus's lax cheek, his other hand running slowly along the baby's back. Occasionally the tiny thing on his chest mewled, gave a stutter of a cry, but mostly she was silent.

Like Severus.

Poppy taught him to swaddle, to change tiny nappies, to feed and burp the baby – but Remus couldn't keep his attention from straying to Severus slumbering in the bed. But slumbering was too quaint a word, he knew. Slumbering was for something more peaceful, natural. And Severus was merely unconscious. And his mind balked at that thought.

"Severus," he said softly, periodically throughout the day – wanting nothing more than dry tone to cleave at his attention, calling him a pest . . . even as the dour man succumbed to his soft touches and

softer kisses.

Three days – *three fucking days* – he waited, as patiently as Remus was able.

"I should have pushed," Remus finally said, voice sharp and hurting. "I should have *told* Poppy to take the baby before this." He whimpered then, high and bright in the silence between them.

"Oh, shut it," Severus managed to groan, attempting to roll over, only for the motion to be stilled with a yelp.

Remus's hand snuck to the other's hip, fingers shaking dreadfully. Dark eyes cracked open blearily. "Careful, love – stitches," he said, voice choked with emotion. All he wanted to do was bundle the darker man to his chest, but the space was occupied.

Poppy bustled over to the bedside; her eyes bright with tears. "Severus!"

A delicate hand touched the darker man's brow. "Loo," he rasped out. And Remus had to beat back the jealousy as Poppy helped Severus from the bed, hand on his elbow and shoulder to keep him upright. He watched them attentively, trying not to growl – waiting rather impatiently for them to return, for Severus to slide back into bed with Remus where he belonged. When they returned, Severus's dark gaze was sealed to his chest, to the baby slumbering there as though the whole thing had exhausted it as well. Every motion was thoroughly calculated as Severus climbed into bed with the greatest effort for as little pain as possible.

Remus bit back the whine rising in his throat, tamping down the urge to wiggle in the covers with happiness.

"S'a girl," Remus whispered, almost reverently. Three days he'd been waiting for this moment, for Severus to finally see their child.

A long finger ran slowly along the baby's spine, tracing delicate limbs, touching tiny feet and hands. The baby clutched at that digit, stilling its motion and pulling a soft look to Severus's eyes.

"Forty-two weeks you've tried to kill me, and you have the audacity

to hold my hand? Insufferable! You'll be a Gryffindor, I'm sure," he drawled, his voice raspy in his throat. The baby gurgled happily, clinging to his finger. And then Remus was bundling her onto his chest, drawing impossibly nearer to him. Severus could feel the fine tremor of the werewolf where their bodies touched. Some sharp, brittle emotion hummed at the back of his mind. He ignored it, letting his mind focus instead on the feel of the baby – his baby; *their* baby – resting on his chest, his hand resting along her back contently.

"Really, Remus. I'm fine, relax," he finally huffed out, glancing over at the lycanthrope – who looked suspiciously like he might burst into tears at any moment, a high whine escaping from behind teeth like leaking air.

"You almost *died* ," he gasped out, wanting nothing more than to shake Severus – who always had a way of discounting the severity of situations. He'd seen it acutely after the darker man had been called to Voldemort's side, during the wars, and now. Remus had seen that lanky body shut down and fail, even as Severus pushed it harder. As though willpower alone was enough to keep him going.

"You're overreacting, I'm sure." But there was exhaustion in the sharp lines of Severus's face, telling him how close Remus was to the truth.

"If anything, you're underreacting, Severus. I love you, you idiotic git! And I had to fucking watch you *almost die,* " Remus finally shouted out, shocking them both. And the loudly uttered words couldn't be unsaid. Not that he *wanted* to unsay them, just . . . he had always imagined saying those words in *their* bed, with bodies wrapped together tightly, while Severus rested languid and spent against his chest. Because in moments like that, Severus no longer held the airs of some dark and distance creature; he almost welcomed Remus's nearly worshipping touches and soft endearments.

Dark eyes were glowering at him, thin lips pursed into a sharp expression. Which told Remus that his words – as he had expected they would be – were unwelcome. Severus drew in a heavy breath through his nose, an indication that something vicious and cruel

was rattling free in the thin man's chest.

"Just because I had your baby does *not* equate to you loving me, Lupin. Don't be a damn fool about the matter," Severus snapped out, eyes hardening coldly. The werewolf growled at him, deep and low in Remus's chest, which only made Severus scowl further.

The baby cried, twisting on his chest as though upset with the whole situation.

Poppy had told herself she wouldn't interfere with the bickering couple. That she would let them quibble it out. But the love on Severus's chest was crying, and she really couldn't have that. Not to mention Remus looked as though he'd burst into angry tears any second as well. And Severus had already turning withdrawn, pulling layers of anger and bitterness about himself in a way that positively made her chest hurt. He'd been almost happy these past few weeks.

"Severus, perhaps a bath would make you feel better," Poppy said sharply, breaking the tension that was mounting around the pair, smothering their baby with it. She extracted the little love from Severus's grip, giving him a look. "The Dungeons are too far for you to return to your rooms, but I'm sure Remus would be more than happy to accommodate you in his." Her lips pursed, giving the werewolf a look as well, before she bundled the baby off.

They'll have to sort it out , she thought brightly, running her hand up and down on the baby's back comfortingly, bundling her away.

Already Remus was rolling out of bed, doing up his shirt and looking expectantly at Severus, where he still laid in the bed. "I'll carry you, if I have to," he finally said, words lacking any real threat, but he felt at a loss. For a few scant weeks, Severus had softened to him, had allowed himself to enjoy Remus's company. He didn't want them to go back to Severus being bristly, all sharp teeth and sharper words.

"I'll hex you," he said, suddenly feeling so exhausted. He didn't want to move. Severus's eyes slipped shut, as though he could block out the unpleasantness of the situation. He let out a sharp cry, his body jostling roughly as Remus's arms wound around him – making it

rather clear the werewolf intended to make good on his threat. Severus pushed on Remus's chest, giving him the coldest glare he could manage, which was admittedly warmer than he would have liked. Because he just wanted to curl into Remus's chest and soak in that warmth. "I am *not an invalid* ," he grumbled weakly.

"I didn't see you moving; thought I should help." The tone was light, almost playful as Remus held out his teaching robes – like it'd been in the Dungeons, when Remus teased him. Severus glared and forced himself to get, slowly, out of bed.

The walk to Remus's rooms was – by far – some of the worst pain he'd felt throughout not just the pregnancy but his whole existence. Every few meters, he had to stop, fingers stretched against the wall to get his breath. Poppy had been unerringly accurate in her assumption that the Dungeons would have been too far away for him to make it. As Severus stopped again, at the foot of the staircase that led to the werewolf's rooms, his head fell forward in his exhaustion. And he didn't make a sound as Remus lifted him easily, carrying him those last hundred feet.

The inner rooms were not, thankfully, overdone in garish Gryffindor scarlet and gold, but rather cherrywood and cream. He allowed himself to be led to the bathroom, where Remus stood in front of him and slowly undid all the buttons of his robes. His shirt and vest were missing, his trousers stained with blood. He tried not to focus on the haphazardly drawn suture line drawn through his skin. The throbbing ache made it impossible to ignore.

Remus swallowed hard; eyes automatically drawn to the stitches as he pushed the heavy robes off Severus's shoulders. He stared intently at the thread crawling out of pale skin as he unbuttoned trousers, letting the fabric gape open around slim hips.

The intimacy was cloyingly thick, sweet and heavy on his tongue. Because how often had he slowly, devotedly undressed the darker man, crawled into bed with him. He blinked back those thoughts, swallowed them down because it wasn't the time for it. So instead, he turned to the tub, filling it with warm water, running his fingers through the liquid up to his wrist – testing temperature and adjusting. He tried not to think overmuch about Severus finishing

undressing behind him.

He held the other's forearm, guiding Severus into the tub, holding him steady as Severus tried to find the strength to do so. He waited while Severus folded his long frame into the water, hissing and wincing as he went. And he fought back the urge to bury his face tight against the other's neck and cry.

The emotion buzzing at the back of his skull was utterly and unbearably morose, and Severus sighed heavily. "Lupin – Remus, quit moping. Pouting is rather unbecoming of you."

A face pressed against his neck, nose at the soft spot behind his ear. A huffed breath stirred his hair. "Not pouting," was whispered against the hinge of his jaw. "Hurting," was finally whined out.

"Yes well, try having a ten-inch incision in your gut," he snapped out.

"That's why I hurt." Fingers gripped his jaw, forcing Severus's head to turn, hazel eyes bored into his. "Do you have any idea what you did to me?"

He opened his mouth, a sharp remark already sitting prettily on the tip of his tongue. But Remus kissed him into silence.

"The last forty-two weeks have been hell." Lips brushed against his, smearing along his jawbone. Severus gave a snort, letting his fingers drift into the water, swirling it as though he couldn't give a damn about what Remus said. "You collapsed." A high whimper just under his ear, as Remus's mouth fell still. "I couldn't get you to wake up. I demanded Poppy cut the baby out. I watched her in your guts up to her wrists. I watched your breathing slow. I nearly lost you – which has been the hardest damn part of all this. To finally have you, only for cruel Fate to snatch you away."

"I've told you," Severus bit out. "A baby does not mean a relationship. I'm not about to force . . ."

Remus kissed him again, fingers tangling in dark hair. "You're insufferable, you know that? I tell you I love you, tell you I was

willing to sacrifice our baby *for your safety* , and your twisted sense of honor thinks you're still forcing me." He pressed his face to the crook of Severus's neck, feeling the muscles work as the other swallowed heavily. "Three fucking days I laid there with you – making every kind of deal with every deity I could think of . . . if only you'd open your eyes."

Sitting back far enough, he grabbed a flannel and dipped it in the water. Slowly, Remus rubbed the cloth along Severus's skin, watching water droplets trace the delicate networking of faint blue veins and silver-pink scars, the pale skin nearly translucent. He bit back the rather wolfish desire to chase after those sparkling gems of liquid with his tongue.

"How Gryffindorish of you," Severus finally muttered, trying to ignore the tightness in his chest. He blinked against that desire for softness. The delicate rasp of the rag against his skin was gratefully welcomed, washing away grime and sweat.

A smile pressed against his skin. "Only for you."

Severus snorted. "Well, that's an utter load of prattle. You'd make a deal with the Devil himself to save anyone. Except Voldemort of course." Severus knew he was working himself up, tearing apart the soft sentiment to try and expose the bones of lies – which he was admittedly beginning to doubt existed.

"I'd only give up my child for you, Severus. You know that." Lips brushed along his neck, a gentle touch to smooth raised hackles. "Let me take you to bed, please."

Severus snorted again softly. "I will not have you pawing at me. We saw what happened last time."

"Can promise to not ravish you," a leer pressed against his skin, "but no promises to keep my hands to myself."

The darker man blushed, which Remus took for consent and promptly bundled Severus – all long, sharp cut-glass lines – into the fluffiest towel he had and off to bed. With Severus laid out on the bed, lurid flashes of pale skin peeking out from burgundy terrycloth

tempting him. Remus stripped down as quickly as his hands would allow, trying to will his body into uninterest.

"What are you doing," Severus hissed meekly, his eyes narrowing as a very naked Remus crawled onto the bed.

"Skin to skin is *very* important, or so I'm told," he purred as he pulled the slighter man against him.

Severus's legs tangled with Remus's almost immediately, and he fought down yet another blush at the intimacy. The lycanthrope heaved a sigh as a large hand began to travel warmly along Severus's skin. That warm, happy emotion buzzed at the back of his skull. He snorted derisively as Remus nosed at his hair, pulling him seemingly impossibly closer. It took too much energy for him to roll his eyes, so he merely closed them instead.

In the morning, Remus laid there, enjoying the warm weight of Severus against his chest. The tightness behind his breastbone had lessened. He ran his fingers slowly along the slighter man's spine, tracing the burrs of vertebrae. Remus tucked his face in against Severus's throat, breathing in slow and deep. "I love you," he whispered, breathing the words into the quiet of the room just past dawn. Quietly enough that they could have been overlooked if Severus had the notion to do so.

A snort puffed through his hair. "So, you said. Truly, you are a foolish Gryffindor."

"Insufferable Slytherin," Remus teased back, burying his nose in Severus's dark hair, reveling in the softness, in the almost bitter scent of anise that overlaid the dark, spicy scent of cloves and cinnamon. And the maudlin – exceedingly Gryffindorish – part of his mind wondered how he'd gone so many nights without Severus warming his bed.

They laid there for however long, and Severus let himself begin to fall back asleep. He had missed quite a bit of the activity the past few months and felt as though he could sleep forever. It also helped that Remus was essentially a mostly-human heating blanket, wrapped around him and easing deep-seated aches from his body.

"Shall we go see our baby. Properly, I mean," Remus finally asked, pulling his fingers through Severus's dark hair. The motion stirred Severus from that delightfully sleepy place somewhere between dreadfully awake and nearly dozing.

"That sounds lovely," he said, pushing at Remus's chest to roll himself over.

"I've some clothes around here that you can use. Those trousers are filthy," he offered up, if only to keep Severus naked a bit longer while Remus bit down the desire to pull him back to bed. Dark eyes pinned him with a look.

"Are you planning on moving anytime soon? You're the one who mentioned going back to the Infirmary; I was perfectly content to linger in bed. I think I've earned that right."

Sighing, Remus rolled off the bed and padded over to the dresser, pulling open a drawer to retrieve some pajamas. He handed them over and turned his attention to dressing himself. And when Remus glanced around at Severus, the sight of the other in *his* clothes choked a soft noise from his chest. Because Severus looked *right* dressed in Remus's too-baggy pajama pants and shirt, the neckline of the shirt pulled to the side and showing off the sharp cut of a collarbone.

"Stop giving me that look," Severus told him with an eyeroll, choosing to overlook the soft, hazy feeling at the back of his thoughts. But Remus was already coming across the room, hands heavy in Severus's hair as lips pressed softly to his.

"I like you in my clothes almost as much as in my bed," the werewolf breathed against the tender stretch of his throat, while palms smoothed along his back, catching at his hips and pulling him closer just barely. There was still the over awareness of his stomach, but from the stitches other than the baby bump, as Remus's body pressed lightly to his.

"That sounds oddly possessive, Lupin," he drawled, which earned him a sharp nip, promptly soothed with the flat of a tongue.

He made a soft noise low in his throat – because it was, the wolf was feeling rather possessive of the darker man, and for once . . . Remus was inclined to follow those instincts. He nosed along the other's neck, sucking in deep lungfuls of anise and cinnamon and clove.

"I thought we were going to see the baby," Severus reminded him, and Remus forced himself to pull back from that lovely skin, clearing his throat.

"Right."

The walk to the Infirmary was carefully slow, with Severus stopping to rest seemingly every five minutes. Remus fought back the urge to just sweep the slighter man off his feet and carry him to the damned Infirmary. He settled for holding onto Severus's bicep, keeping him standing when it looked as though the darker man would collapse. And after what felt like a small eternity later, they entered the Infirmary, to be met by Poppy cradling the babe to her chest. She ushered them into the back room, smiling – hopelessly in love with the feel of the baby in her arms.

"Shirt off, Severus – skin to skin is very important to the baby," Poppy quipped, holding said baby all bundled up tightly in a pale pink blanket – which looked oddly like something Minerva had knitted.

"Yes," he remarked drily, undoing buttons and giving Remus a mild glare, "I've heard that somewhere."

Severus situated himself on the bed, carefully avoiding looking at the thick, dark knots of thread adorning his stomach, and lifted his arms. Which Poppy promptly filled with the baby; the blanket loosened just enough for him to slip his hand underneath. The baby's skin was soft and warm against his palm. "I'm glad we both made it," he finally said, breathing the words aloud to whomever would listen, his jaw muscle tense to keep his voice from cracking and falling apart. His dark eyes sought out Poppy, where she hovered near the edge of the bed. "Is she . . ." His question died pitifully on his lips, swept away by what ifs.

She offered him a bright, admittedly watery, smile. "Perfectly healthy, *normal* baby girl," Poppy responded pointedly, squeezing his shoulder carefully.

Ignoring the small exchange, Remus crawled onto the bed, folding himself as closely as possible to the pair – his pair; the only two people in the world he found to truly matter. He rested his cheek on the sharp cut of Severus's shoulder, watching as long fingers traced soft patterns on even softer skin.

"What shall we call her?"

"Rowan," Severus said, voice decisive enough that Remus gave him a look.

"Been thinking about it, have you?"

"No. It just . . . fits. But if you have another in mind, let's hear it."

Chuckling, Remus tucked his face in against the long column of Severus's neck, arm wrapping around his all-too bony shoulders. "I think it's perfect." He placed a kiss to the soft spot just under a sharp jaw. "I think *this* is perfect."

"Of course, you know if you're planning on staying," Severus drawled, "you'll have to . . ." and he made a snipping motion with his unoccupied hand. "I'll not be confined to the Dungeons – barefoot and pregnant like a newlywed village youth – for the rest of my life. Once has been enough."

Remus laughed, pleased with the overall statement despite the connotation. After all, it was an invitation to stay in Severus's and Rowan's lives. To find himself in Severus's bed every night, to finally have what he'd been waiting the past few years for – maybe longer, if he was completely honest with himself.

"Of course," the lycanthrope breathed against his skin. "Anything for you, love."

And, for once, Severus didn't try to tear the sentiment apart. He didn't try to explain away the softly humming devotion and sense of love at the back of his thoughts, tickling his brain and leaving his

chest tight.

He simply let it be.